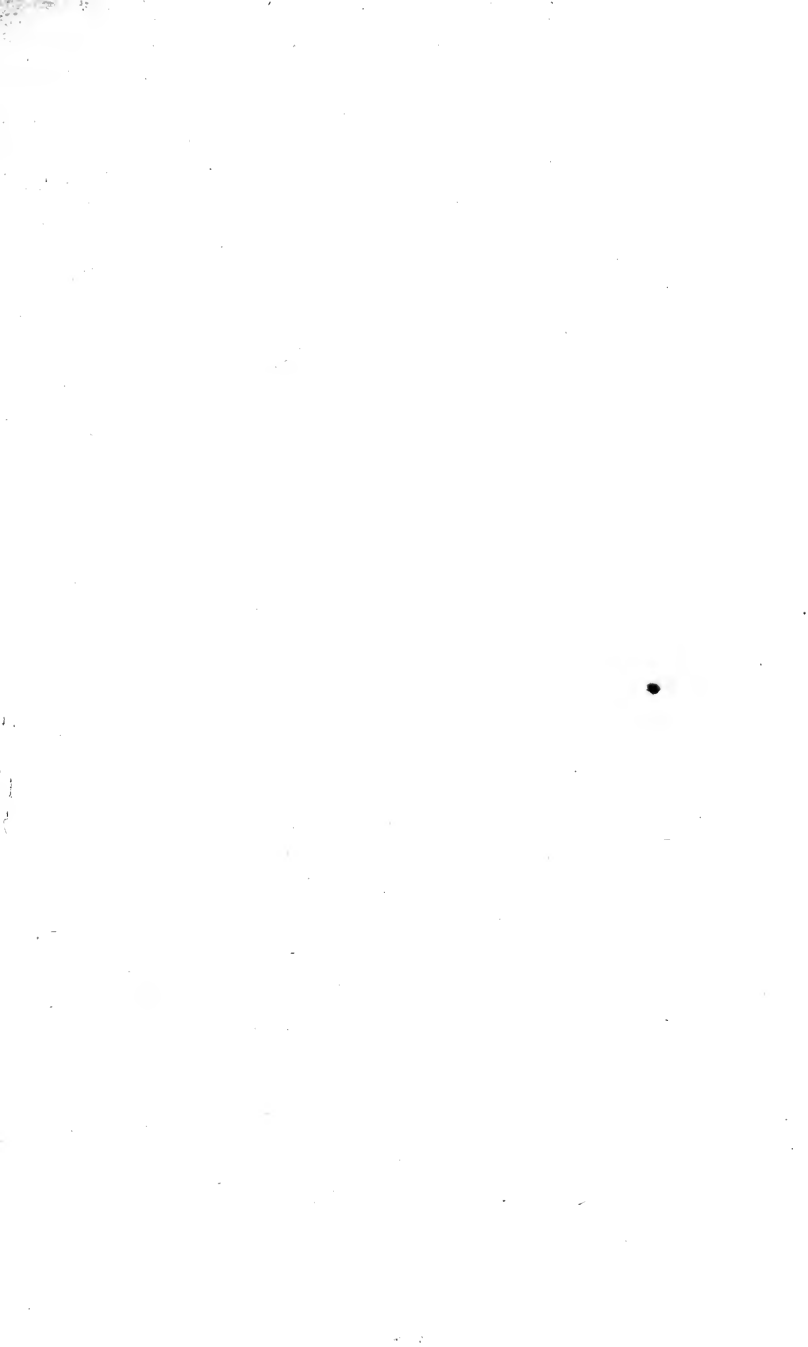


"AS SOON KILL A MAN AS KILL A BOOK."

Thomas · Arthur · Jones.

What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.





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AN ISLE OF SURREY.

A Novel.

BY

RICHARD DOWLING,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART,"
"UNDER ST. PAUL'S," "MIRACLE GOLD," ETC.

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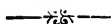
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AN ISLE OF SURREY.

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CHAPTER I.

A NEW VISITOR AT CRAWFORD'S HOUSE.

WHEN Red Jim saw Crawford hauled out of the water and aided up the side of the hulk his interest in maritime affairs was over. He had gone down to the end of the Pine Grove in the hope that Crawford would change his mind, and adopt the land route when he saw how uninviting the means of getting to the steamboat looked. In case Crawford came back he might fairly count on getting sixpence, surly as the other had been to him. But now there was no chance of anything good, not even of Crawford being drowned. Red Jim looked

up at the sky as though reproaching heaven with doing him ill-turns, faced right about, and began retracing his fruitless steps.

As he walked he reflected that it was not every day one saw a gentleman fall into the river and rescued. He had seen this sight to-day, and, moreover, as far as the shore was concerned, he had had the monopoly of the spectacle. Then after a long pause he asked himself was it not possible to convert his unique position into a little money?

Once more he turned those vacant blue eyes of his up to the sky, not this time, however, in reproach, but in appeal for light.

Suddenly he shook his head with the quick short jerk of determination, and quickened his pace. "Why, of course," he said out loud, "I'll go to Crawford's

House and tell them about it, and they'll give me a tanner for my kindness." So he hastened along until he arrived at the shabby green door, and then he knocked.

Hetty opened the door, and seeing a strange man, who looked as though he had a right to come there, concluded he had called about the ice-house. "O!" said she, "you've called about those gates, have you?"

"Hallo!" thought Jim, "there may be another tanner in this. Let's see." All Jim's thoughts ran on tanners. A shilling was two tanners, half-a-crown five, a sovereign ever so many. In the case between him and the young lady at the door caution was the great thing. He must take care not to commit himself. So he said nothing, but looked round as though in search of the gates.

"Come this way," said Hetty, observing

the glance of search, "and I will show you the place."

"Yes, ma'am," said Red Jim, entering the house and following Hetty through it to the little quay beyond.

"These are the doorways that Mr. Crawford wishes to have boarded up," said Hetty, pronouncing the name with an effort, for she was still in tumult and perplexity about his visit and words.

"Yes, ma'am," said Red Jim with extreme deference, and looking full at her with his wide, open expressionless blue eyes, but moving no muscle, showing no sign of taking action.

The girl was highly strung, and his impassive stolidity irritated her.

"Well, what are you going to do?" she asked briskly.

"Whatever you like, ma'am," he answered with gallantry and impartiality.

"Whatever *I* like!" she cried impatiently. "I have nothing to do with it. What did Mr. Crawford say to you about this place. There can be no mistake, I suppose—you saw him to-day?"

"I did."

"And what did he say to you about this?" pointing to the gaping gateway.

"Nothing."

The girl stared at him in angry surprise. "Then why did you come here!"

"To tell you, ma'am, that Mr. Crawford fell in the river. I thought you'd like to know that."

"Mr. Crawford fell into the river! You thought *I* would like to know *that*! What do you mean?" Hetty was beginning to get confused and a little frightened. There was first of all Crawford's visit, then his account of his horrible dream of her drowning, then his strange, impudent

words to her ; now came this dreadful-looking man to say that *Crawford* had fallen into the river, and, last of all, she would be glad to hear he had fallen into the river? "Why do you think I would be glad to hear that Mr. Crawford fell into the river?"

"Well, he lives here, and when people fall into the river the folk they live with are mostly glad to hear of it."

"O," thought the girl, with a feeling of relief at finding that no mysterious net was closing round her, "so you only came to tell me the news?"

"And to tell you more news."

"What is it?"

"That he was got out again."

"Of course."

"But you didn't know until I told you."

"Certainly I did. If he hadn't been

taken out you would have said he was drowned."

This was a sore blow to Red Jim. It had occurred to him as a brilliant idea to split up his news into two parts. First, that Crawford had fallen in; second, that Crawford had been dragged out. He had a vague hope that, treated in this way, the news might be worth two tanners, as it consisted of two items. It now occurred to him that in future he ought to say a man was drowned, get his reward, and then, as a second item, say that it had been for a long time believed he was drowned, but that it was at last found out he wasn't. In the present case, however, he thought he had better make the best of things as they were. He told her then exactly what had happened as far as he had been able to see, and assured her he had run every step of the

way and was mortal dry, and he hoped she'd consider his trouble and good intentions.

She gave him sixpence.

"And how much this job, ma'am?" he asked, pointing to the gateways.

"I have nothing to do with that. When you knocked I thought Mr. Crawford had sent you."

"Well, he as good as sent me. Only he fell in, I'd never have come here."

"But you have done nothing, and you are to do nothing, and I have nothing to do with it," said the girl, a little apprehensively. They were alone on the quay at the back of the house, and there was not a soul in the house but herself and this ragged, rugged, red-bearded, rusty-necked man, who was asking her for money he had no claim to, and asking her for it on, no doubt, the knowledge of their isolation.

“There’s my time, though, ma’am,” said Red Jim firmly. “You call me in, and you say there’s the gate, and I do all I can for you.”

“But you have done nothing at all. Why should I pay you for doing nothing? I thought you were Mr. Crawford’s man.”

The girl was now becoming fairly alarmed. Suppose this horrible man should become violent?

“Some one must pay me for my time, ma’am. I’m only a poor labouring man trying to earn his bread, and if people go and take up my time, how am I to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, or any other way? That’s what I want to know.”

He stood in front of her: between her and the door of the house.

The girl now became fairly frightened. She was by no means timid by nature. But here was she hidden from the view of

any one, alone with this rugged, threatening, desperate man. No one on the tow-path could see them, because Boland's Ait intervened. Worst of all, she had not any money. The sixpence she had given him was the last coin in her possession; still, she tried to look brave.

"If you want any money for this job as you call it, go to Mr. Crawford for it."

"How do I know where to find Mr. Crawford?"

"He lives at Richmond."

"He lives here, and my principle is cash—no tick. A nice thing, indeed, to expect a poor labouring man to give his time and anxiety of mind to jobs, and then tell him to go to Richmond for his money! Is that justice or fair-play?"

"Well, I tell you that you must go to him. I have no money." She was beginning to feel faint and giddy.

“No money, and live in a house like that!” he cried, pointing up to the old dilapidated habitation to which the late owner of the place had given his name. “Why, how could any one keep up a house like that without lots of money?”

Red Jim’s notion of the probable financial result of this interview had enlarged considerably since it had begun. He had talked himself into the conviction that he had an honest claim for compensation for loss of time, and he saw that they were in a lonely place, that this girl was frightened, and that there was no succour for her near at hand. He now put down the result of his inspection of the ice-house at four tanners.

“I tell you I have no money,” she repeated, feeling sick, “and you must go away at once.”

“Look here, ma’am ; what am I going to

do with the rest of my day if I get nothing for this?" He hadn't done a day's work for months. "The rest of my day is no sort of use to me. I own I haven't been here half a day, but half a day is gone, all the same, and I couldn't think of taking less than two shillings; it's against the rules of my Society to take less than two shillings for half a day, anyhow."

"I tell you once for all, I have no money."

She began to tremble. She had never before been in such an alarming situation as this. She was afraid to threaten lest he should at once seize her and fling her headlong into the ice-house, when there would be no William Crawford or anybody else to rescue her. She could have borne the thought of death with comparative fortitude, but the girl's dainty senses revolted from the notion of contact with this

foul and hideous being. She felt that if he touched her she should die.

“Nice thing for you to say!” cried the man angrily. “Take a poor man in here and steal—yes, steal—half a day from him, and then say you have no money!”

Up to this he had been importunate, then angry, but he had not threatened. Now he advanced a step, and, shaking his fist at her, said:

“Look here, if you don’t just pay me what you owe me I’ll——”

The girl screamed, and at the same time, as if by magic, Red Jim disappeared from her sight.

She looked down.

Red Jim was rolling and writhing on the ground, felled by a blow from behind.

She looked up. Francis Bramwell stood before her, pallid with indignation.

“This blackguard has been annoying you, Miss Layard,” said he, spurning the prostrate man with his foot.

“O, thank you, Mr. Bramwell! I thought he was going to kill me.”

“I came out to fetch Freddie back, but found it wasn’t quite time, and then I heard your voice and this wretch’s angry words, and came round and crossed. He hasn’t *touched* you?” asked Bramwell fiercely. The whole man was roused now, and he looked large in stature and irresistible in force.

“O, no! He has not touched me, but he threatened me, and I felt as though I should die.”

“What shall I do with him. Give him to the police?”

“Don’t do that, *guv’nor*,” said the prostrate man. He had made no attempt to rise. He did not want to have his other

ear deaf and the inside of his head at the other side ringing like a sledge-bell. "Don't do that, guv'nor, for they have something against me about a trifle of canvas and a few copper bolts I never had anything to do with."

"Very well. Now, Miss Layard, if you will go into the house, I'll attend to this gentleman. I shall take him across my place to the tow-path, and then come back to see how you are."

"But you won't harm him, Mr. Bramwell?" asked Hetty in a tremulous voice as she moved away.

"You hear what the lady says?" whined Jim. "Good kind lady, don't go away and leave me to him. He has half killed me already, and if you leave me to him he'll murder me. Do let me go through your house. I was only joking. Indeed, it was only a little joke, and I only went

on as I did to make your beautiful face smile. That's all, indeed."

"I promise you, Miss Layard, not to hurt him in the least. He shall be much better off when he leaves me than he is now."

Hetty went into the house.

"He's going to pay me the half day's wages," thought Jim, as at Bramwell's bidding he rose from the ground and crossed over to Boland's Ait. Bramwell led the way to the canal side of the islet.

"How much did you claim from that lady?" asked Bramwell, who knew nothing of the justness of the demand.

"Two shillings, fairly earned and fairly due," answered Jim, his heart expanding under the hope of tanners. "You will not keep a poor working man out of his own?"

"I'll pay you. But first you must

answer me one question : Can you swim ? ”
He took a two-shilling piece out of his pocket.

“ I can, sir,” said Jim eagerly. “ I can do almost anything.”

Bramwell flung the coin across the canal to the tow-path, crying, “ Then swim for that.”

“ But, sir—— ”

“ In you go, clothes and all, and if ever I find you here again I’ll hand you over to your friends the police. Don’t keep standing there, or I’ll heave you in. Do as you are told, sir. The washing and cooling will do you good.”

And seeing there was no chance of escape, and fearing some one might come by and steal the coin, Red Jim dived into the dark turbid waters and crossed to the opposite shore.

When Bramwell saw the man safely out

of the canal he turned away, and, having crossed by the stage, entered for the first time Crawford's House—the house of the man who had wrecked his home and his happiness and his life three years before.



CHAPTER II.

A BRIDGE OF SIGHS.

WHEN Bramwell entered Crawford's House the first sight that met his eyes was the form of Hetty Layard lying prone on the floor of the passage.

With a cry of dismay he sprang to her and raised her. He looked round for help and called out, but there was no succour in sight; no response came to his cry. He took her up and carried her into the sitting-room, and laid her on the couch.

"I might have guessed she would faint," he moaned; "and now what am I to do?"

There was water on the table laid for dinner. He sprinkled some on her face.

“What am I to do? Shall I run for help?” he cried, looking frantically round the room.

At that moment there was the sound of a latch-key in the door. Bramwell rushed out eagerly into the passage, saying to himself, “This must be either her brother or Mr. Crawford; Philip told me there are only two keys.”

If instead of going up the river in the steamboat Crawford had come back to Welford, he would have arrived at about this time.

The front door opened, and a man with a remarkably long beard entered, and for an instant stood looking in speechless amazement at the other man.

“My name is Bramwell. Your sister has fainted. She is in the front room.”

“Fainted!” cried Alfred Layard in alarm, as he dashed past the other.

At that moment Hetty opened her eyes and sighed.

“Hetty, Hetty, dear Hetty! what is this? What is the matter?”

Bramwell remained in the passage. He walked up and down in great agitation.

“I don’t know what happened,” said the girl, in a weak, tremulous voice.

Her brother got some wine, and made her drink a little.

“Try and remember, dear,” said Layard with passionate tenderness. “Did any accident occur? Drink just a little more. Did you get a fright, dear? Has anything happened to the boy?”

“No, Alfred. O, I am better now. I remember it all. A dreadful man terrified me, and Mr. Bramwell came to my assistance, and I ran into the house; and I can remember no more.”

Bramwell, hearing voices, knew that

Hetty had recovered, and that he could be of no further use; so he stole quietly out of the house, and returned to his own island domain.

He did not seek the boys, who were playing in the timber-yard that the old barrow was a Punch-and-Judy show. He took the canal side of the wharf, and began pacing up and down hurriedly.

His condition was one of extreme exaltation; he knew not, inquired not, at what. He trod the clouds, and surveyed below his feet a subjugated and golden world. The air was intoxication, and life a dream of jocund day. He did not pause to ask a reason for these feelings and sensations. They were his; that was enough.

Of late the hideous gloom in which he had lived for two years, a solitary upon that lonely and unlovely islet, had been

leaving him as darkness leaves a hill at the approach of day. Now from the summit to the base, his nature seemed bathed in an extraordinary midday splendour. His soul was shining among the stars. He was a blessed spirit amid the angels. He was the theme to which all the rest of the world answered in harmonious parts.

It was not passion or love, but a spiritual effulgence. It was like the elation induced by a subtle perfume. He would have been satisfied to be, and only to be, if he might be thus. He was in clear air at a stupendous height of happiness, and yet did not feel giddy. He could think of no higher earthly joy than he experienced. It was a joy the very essence of which seemed of the rapture of heaven. It was a kind of ecstatic and boundless worship from a self-conscious

and self-centred soul. It idealised the world, and restored Paradise to earth.

In his mind was no thought, no defined thought, of love for his beautiful neighbour, Hetty Layard. He was in the delicious spiritual experiences of that hour merely celebrating his emancipation from bondage. The note from Kate which had come with Frank and the subsequent announcement of Kate's death in the newspapers had left him no room to doubt that he was free. That day he had struck a man an angry blow for the first time in all his life. And he had struck that blow in defence of this beautiful girl, who was so good and so devoted to the little orphan boy, the son of her brother. He had an orphan boy too, and she was very gentle to his son. He had known for some time that he was a free man, free to look upon the face of woman with

a view to choosing another wife; but until this day, until this hour, he had not realised what this freedom meant.

The notion that he might take another companion for life had not taken concrete form since Frank's coming, and now the only way in which it presented itself to him was that he might smile back to Hetty's smile, and glory in her beauty.

He was startled by hearing a voice saying behind him, "Mr. Bramwell, I have taken the liberty of coming over uninvited to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your timely and much-needed aid to my sister."

Bramwell coloured, and became confused. He was unaccustomed to new faces, unaccustomed to thanks, unaccustomed to pleasant thoughts of woman.

"I—I did nothing," he said. "It was merely by accident I knew about it."

To be thanked made him feel as though he had done something shameful.

"However it happened," said Layard, taking his hand in both his own and shaking it cordially, "you have placed me under a deep debt of gratitude to you."

"If you do not wish to make me very uncomfortable, you will not say another word about it. I hope Miss Layard is nothing the worse of the affair?"

"My sister is all right. Of course it gave her an ugly turn. It isn't a nice place to encounter a bullying rowdy alone. Since you ask me to say no more about your share in the business, I shall be dumb."

The two men were now walking up and down side by side along the tiny quay of the tiny islet.

A thin film of cloud dulled the glare of the afternoon sun. The whole expanse of

heaven was radiant with diaphanous white clouds; a barge laden with wood indolently glided by to the clank-clank of the horse's hoofs on the tow-path; the sounds from Welford Bridge, which in the mornings came sharp and clear, were now dulled by the muffled hum of larger noises from afar. There was an air of silence and solitude over Boland's Ait. Notwithstanding the griminess of the surroundings and the dilapidations of the buildings on the holm, there was an aspect of peace and retirement in the place.

Hetty had not told her brother anything of Crawford's visit save as much as was necessary to explain the admission of Red Jim to the house and quay.

After a few sentences, Layard said, "You must know, Mr. Bramwell, I don't think I shall stay in this house a minute longer than I can possibly help."

“Indeed!” said Bramwell, feeling as though the sunlight from the sky had been suddenly dulled, and the things upon which his eyes fell had grown more squalid.

“To be candid with you, I don’t care about my landlord. He is, to say the least of it, eccentric; and after the affair of to-day I shall never be easy. You see, the house is quite isolated, and no one ever by any chance passes the door.”

“It must be very lonely for Miss Layard,” Bramwell said, forgetting in his sympathy for the girl his own two years of absolute seclusion.

“She says, and I believe her, that she does not feel the want of company; but after to-day she will, I am afraid, dread the place. Of course, I must get some person to stay with her all the time I am out of the house. Could any one have been more helpless than she was to-day?”

“What you say has a great deal of force in it; but,” said he, trying to restore the full complement of sunlight to the sky, “don’t you think with a second person in the house all would be safe?”

“Well, I should imagine so; but one does not like to be continually saying, ‘all is safe.’ One likes to take it for granted, as one takes the sufficiency of air or the coming of daylight with the sun.”

They walked for a few seconds in silence, and then Bramwell said, “No barge ever comes through the Bay now, but, owing to my habit with the floating stage on the canal, I moor the second stage to the Ait every afternoon when Freddie has gone home, and haul it across in the morning. For the future I shall leave it across permanently, so that Miss Layard may feel I am as near to her as some one living next door. I hope and trust, and believe,

she will never have any need of my help, but it may give her a little confidence to know that I can be with her instantly in case of need."

"It is extremely kind of you to think of that. It seems you are determined to place me under obligations I can never discharge. The worst of it is that when I came over here I had it in my mind to ask you a favour, and now you have offered to do one unasked."

"If what you came to ask is anything in the world I can do, you may count on me, Mr. Layard. For, remember, that although this is the first time we have met, I am quite well acquainted with you through Philip Ray."

"And I with you, through him also, or I should not speak so freely."

"Isn't Ray a fine fellow?" asked Bramwell enthusiastically.

"The finest fellow I know," answered Layard cordially.

"He is a little enthusiastic, or hot-headed, or fierce, I know, but he will calm down in years. Indeed, I find that of late he is calming down a good deal. As I said before, I treat you as an old friend. I suppose I have been so long an eremite that once I come forth and open my mouth I shall never stop talking. What I have in my mind about Philip, who was the only friend of my solitude, is that if he got a good sensible wife it would be the making of him."

"I have no doubt it would."

"But the worst of it is that I don't think he ever once regarded one woman with more favour than another. In fact, I have always put him down as a man who will never marry."

"Indeed!" said Layard. "I wonder

does Ray himself share that notion. If he does, he is treating Hetty badly," he thought.

"And the pity of it is, that if he would only marry he would make the best husband in England."

"It is indeed a pity," said Layard, but he did not say what constituted the pity. To himself, "I don't think anything has been said between them yet, but it seems to me Hetty or he will have some news for me very soon." He said aloud, "The little favour I told you I had to ask——"

"Of course; and I told you if it lay within my power I'd do it."

"Yes; and it does lie easily within your power, and I will take no excuse. Come over and spend an hour with us this evening."

"But I cannot!" cried Bramwell.

“But you must. We will take no excuse.”

He wavered. His views of all things had greatly altered since he was first invited to Crawford's House. “Still the boy. I cannot leave him alone.” He felt half inclined to go.

“The boy will not be alone. Why, now that you have decided to leave the stage across all night, your house and ours may be looked on as one.”

What a pleasant fancy it was that Crawford's House, where she lived, and Boland's Ait, where he lived, might be looked on as one!

“If,” went on Layard, “you are uneasy about your boy, at any moment you can run across and see him. You really have no excuse. Our sons have been friends some time, and now you have placed me under a great obligation to you, and you

refuse to make the obligation greater. Is that generous of you?"

Bramwell smiled. "I am conquered, fairly conquered."

"Very well; and mind, not later than eight o'clock. Now, where's this young savage of mine? His aunt will imagine you have sold the two of us into slavery."



CHAPTER III.

A LAST RESOLVE.

“GOOD gracious, Mrs. Mellor, you don’t mean to say you have been to the hospital and got back again since! But why do I say such a thing? If you had wings you couldn’t do it,” exclaimed kind-hearted Mrs. Pemberton as Kate Mellor walked into the greengrocer’s shop in Leeham, hard by Welford, the same day William Crawford jumped aboard the moving steamboat after his immersion and scene with the invalid woman at the Mercantile Pier.

“No,” answered Mrs. Mellor wearily. She did not remove her veil on entering the shop. “I hadn’t the heart to go

to-day. I got as far as the pier and then turned back." She did not care to enter into any further explanation.

"Hadn't the heart, dear child! And why hadn't you the heart?" said the sympathetic woman, raising her ponderous bulk with deliberation from the chair, and going quickly with outstretched hands to her unfortunate lodger.

"I didn't feel equal to it, and so I came back."

"Well, dear, if you didn't go to the hospital I'm very glad you came back here straight, for the house seems queer and lonesome when you're not in it. You don't feel any worse, do you, dear?"

"No worse, thank you, Mrs. Pember-ton, but I think the heat tired me a little, and that I'll go up and lie down awhile."

"The very best thing you could do,

dear. There's nothing to freshen you up when you're hot and tired like a nice quiet rest in a cool room ; and the sun is off your room now. I was just saying to Mrs. Pearse here, that I was sure you'd come in half-dead of the heat. Is there anything I could get you, dear, before you lie down?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Pemberton," and Kate Mellor passed out of the shop and up to her bedroom on the first floor.

"That's just the way with her always," said Mrs. Pemberton to Mrs. Pearse. "She never complains of anything but being tired, and she never wants anything. If ever there was a broken heart in this world it's hers. She has said to me over and over again it was a mistake that she recovered. What makes me so uneasy about her is that I am afraid her money won't last her much longer, and

that when it's gone she'll run away. Though, goodness knows, she's welcome to stay as long as she likes, for she's a real lady, and it's almost as easy to keep two as one, particularly as she isn't a bit particular about what she eats or drinks; and I don't want to let her room unless I could get some one as nice as she, and I'd go far before I could find her equal "

"The loss of the child is preying upon her mind," said Mrs. Pearse. "I remember when I lost my little Ted, I thought I should never be able to lift my head again."

"Ah, but you lost your little Ted in a natural though a sad way; but poor Mrs. Mellor lost her boy by an accident, as it were, and by her own act, too. You know, she is very close, and although she's as friendly as can be, she never says anything

about the past. Whoever she sent the boy to will not give him back to her again."

"And you don't know to what person she sent the child?"

"He went first to Boland's Ait, but of course not to stop there. Why, there's no woman on the Ait to look after a child. The boy must be gone to some of his father's people. O, it's a sad, sad case! and I have a feeling—you can't help your feelings—that she's not long for this world, poor thing; and it breaks my heart to think of that, for I do love her as if she was my own child, though it was never given to me to know the feelings of a mother. I expect that private detective knew all about the case."

Meanwhile Kate Mellor had taken off her bonnet and cloak, and lain down on her bed, to rest and think. Up to that day she had lived hour by hour, since the loss of

her boy and her recovery, with no definite purpose. At first she had been too ill and weak to consider her position or determine upon any course of action. She had drifted down to this hour without any plan or purpose. She knew the law would not enable her to recover her child, and she felt certain that her husband would see the child dead rather than restored to her arms. She had inserted the announcement of her death partly that her husband might not be fettered in anything he might design for the welfare of their child by considerations of her, and partly out of a pathetic craving for pain and self-sacrifice. She had bought the paper, and had cried a score of times over the bald, cold intimation that the world was over for her: for her the once beautiful and beloved bride of Frank Mellor, now the deserted, marred outcast of shame. She had wept that she,

Kate Ray, Kate Mellor, was dead and buried before thirty—when she was not twenty-five. She had wept that she was poor. She had wept that her voice, her only means of earning a living, had been destroyed. She had wept longest of all that her beauty was gone from her for ever. Her beauty had been her greatest gift, her greatest curse, and she wept for it as though it had been an unmixed blessing.

Lying on her bed here to-day, she had no tears to shed. The scene on the pier had in some mysterious way calmed her spirits. She had read the announcement of her death in the paper, and now she was dead in verity.

Why should she live? What had she to live for? Everything woman could hold dear was gone—husband, child, reputation, beauty. In material affairs her destitution could scarcely be greater than

it was at this moment. She had a little money still left, but when that was gone where should she find more? *He*, the betrayer, had been overjoyed to get his life back from the jaws of death that day; she, the victim, would enter those awful jaws freely. But she must see her child, her little Frank, the sweet baby she had held at her breast and cherished with the warmth of her embraces.

She was afraid of only one person in the world, and that was Frank Mellor, who had changed his name to Francis Bramwell for shame of her. If he found her he would kill her, and she owned that at his hands she deserved death; she had robbed him of everything he held dear.

She had resolved upon death, but she could not take it at his hands. It was too awful to think of a meeting between them. That would be ten times worse than the

most painful form of quitting life. That would be an agony of the spirit ten thousand times transcending any possible agony of the body.

Frank, her husband, had always been a man of strong feeling. At times this strong feeling had exhibited itself to her in profound taciturnity, at times in overwhelming ecstasy. If she should encounter him now, he would be possessed by the demon of insatiable revenge ; he would strike her to the ground and murder her cruelly, and mangle her dead body. While he was beating the life out of her he would revile and curse her. He would heap coals of fire on her head, and crush out of her the last trace of self-respect. And in all this he would, perhaps, be justified—in much of it certainly.

How good and indulgent he had been to her! She had not understood him then.

She had eyes for nothing then but admiration and finery. To-day she had nothing to call forth admiration—no finery; and yet, if she had not hearkened to that other man, could she believe that Frank would not love and shield and cherish her now as he had then? Frank was the very soul of honour. He would not hurt a brute or wrong any living being. She had not known, had not understood, him then as she did now, judged by the light of subsequent experience.

She must see the boy once more—just once more before she died. She would not look upon another day. By some means or other she would see her child, and then bid good-bye to the world. When she saw her child, there would be the canal close at hand. But that would not do. It would not do to pollute with the last crime of her life the presence of her child.

No ; the river of which that other man had stood in such terror would be the fitting ending place for such a wicked life as hers.

O, how different would all have been if only that man had not tempted her with lies, and she had not listened through vanity ! Frank would have been good and kind to her, and by this time she should have grown to love him as she had never loved the other ; and her boy, her darling, her little Frank, her baby, would be with her, his arms round her neck, his soft, round, warm cheek against her own !

“ But, there, there, there ! ” she moaned, putting her hand before her blotched, disfigured, worn face. “ It is all over ! I have lost everything, and no one is to blame but myself and the other. Only I must suffer all. Yet it will not be for long. I *will* see my boy to-night, even if I die

there and then. I don't care about dying. Death has refused me once, but it shall not this time. O, my little Frank! my little innocent Frank! my baby that I warmed against my breast!"

She lay in a kind of torpor for a few hours; then, having got up and made some small arrangements, she wrote a note for Mrs. Pemberton, placed it in her trunk, and, putting a lock of hair and an old worn glove of her boy's in her bosom, went down-stairs and slipped out by the private door beside the shop.



CHAPTER IV.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD'S LUCK.

WHEN William Crawford found himself safe aboard the moving steamboat, he uttered an exclamation of intense relief and satisfaction. He looked quickly behind him, and noticed with a laugh that pursuit was out of the question. He was safe! His life had been twice imperilled that day, and he had escaped with nothing worse than a wetting. He had been in imminent danger of death from drowning, had been saved by a woman whom he had ruined, and then escaped from her deadly demoniacal, maniac wrath. After all this, who could say that there was not luck in the world? and who could deny that luck had befriended him in a phenomenal manner?

Yes, he was lucky; he had been lucky all his life up to this, except at cards, and he should be lucky to the end. If Fate had meant ever to do him an ill turn, surely it would not have let slip two such remarkable opportunities. No, he was born to good fortune; and the saying was true that it was better to be born lucky than rich. And, thinking of riches, this day's mishaps had not even cost him the fifty pounds, for he still held the notes in his hand. What a fool that woman was not to take them! But then she had always been a fool.

And with this generous thought of the woman who had sacrificed everything for him, he dismissed her from his mind.

He was hatless, and his clothes were all rumpled and creased; and the water dripped from the ends of his trousers, making a wet patch on the deck wherever he stepped.

The people on the steamboat had noticed the hasty manner of his coming aboard, his rush out of the pier-master's room, and his leap from the hulk. They also observed that his clothes were wet, and that he was without any covering for his head. They were observing him with interest and curiosity. Becoming conscious of this, and feeling a slight shiver pass through him, he turned to one of the crew and said :

“In coming from the shore to the pier I fell into the water. Is there any brandy aboard ?”

“Plenty, sir, in the fore-cabin.”

To the fore-cabin he went forthwith, and drove off the chill with brandy, and escaped the curious eyes of the passengers.

He remained below until the boat arrived at Blackfriars Bridge. Here he went ashore, and, hailing the first hansom, drove to a tailor and outfitter's, where he got

everything he wanted except boots, and these the obliging shopkeeper procured for him.

It was now four o'clock. He had had two great shocks that day, each of which was more severe than any other he had endured in his life. He felt that something in the way of compensation was due to him. Play went on all day long and all night long at the Counter Club. What better could he do with himself than have a few quiet games before going back to his dull Richmond home? He did not like appearing at the club in a suit of ready-made clothes, but, then, all kinds of men, in all kinds of costumes, went to the Counter; and he had never been a great dandy.

Accordingly to the Counter he drove, with four of the damp ten-pound notes in his pocket and some broken money. It was not as much as he should have liked, but,

then, he had no intention of making a night of it. He would get back to Richmond about dusk.

He left the club just in time to catch the last train for home. He found an empty compartment, and, as he threw himself into a corner cried, softly to himself:

“Luck! Why, of course, there never was such luck as mine! I used to be unlucky at cards. Unlucky at cards, lucky in love, they say. Well, I have been more lucky than most men in love, and here now are cards turning in my favour. I have now won twice running. I have a hundred and twenty pounds more in my pocket than when I came to town this morning. There seems to be absolutely no end to my luck. If that fool Kate had taken the fifty, of course I could not have played, and, of course, if I had not played I could not have won. My good fortune is almost

miraculous. If any other person but Kate had rescued me, he or she would have taken the money, and there would have been no play; and if I had not fallen into the water it is very likely I should not have thought of treating myself to a game. Upon my word, it *is* miraculous—nothing short of miraculous.”

His eyes winked rapidly, and he stroked his smoothly-shaven chin with intense satisfaction.

“But,” he went on, “the whole thing is due to that delightful Hetty, for if I had not wanted to see that charming girl again I should not have gone to Welford to-day, and, of course, should not have played this afternoon. Like all other gamblers, I am a bit superstitious, and I do believe that she has brought me luck. Now twice out of three times that I have played since I saw her I have won, and that never happened

in all my life before. Yes, she has undoubtedly brought me luck. Suppose this luck continued, I should be a rich man in a short time. I should be quite independent of Welford and Singleton Terrace, Richmond, and although I am good at private theatricals, I am getting a bit sick of Singleton Terrace, Richmond. A man gets tired of a goody-goody part sooner than of any other kind. I do believe, after all, that if I had that three thousand pounds for capital and Hetty for luck, I should be better off without Singleton Terrace, Richmond. That is an aspect of the future well worth thinking over."

When he got home he found to his surprise and disgust that his wife had not yet gone to bed. He put his arm round her and kissed her tenderly, and chid her gently for sitting up. She said she was anxious about him, as he had said he should be back early.

“The fact of the matter is, Nellie, I had a great deal more trouble about those gates than I anticipated. You have no notion of how stupid workmen can be. They always want to do something or other you have said distinctly you do not want to have done. I told the creature I went to as plainly as I am telling you that I did not wish to have ice-house doors, but simply gates sufficiently strong and well-secured to prevent any one falling into the water. I told him to go see the place, and that I should come back in an hour to hear what he had to say about price ; and would you believe it? the animal had made out an estimate for double doors ! I could hardly get him to adopt my views. He said an ice-house ought to have ice-house doors, and that to put up any others would not be workmanlike, and would expose him to contempt and ridicule in the neighbour-

hood! Did you ever hear anything so monstrously absurd in all your life?"

"It was very provoking, William, and I am sorry that my foolish fears caused you so much trouble," she said in a tone of self-reproach, softly stroking his hand held in both hers.

"Not at all, dear! Not at all! I am very glad I went. But of course the work about the gates did not keep me till now. I have had a little adventure."

She looked up at him in alarm, and glanced in fear at the unfamiliar clothes he wore. "A little adventure?" she cried faintly.

"Yes," he said, with one of his short quick laughs, "but you need not be uneasy; I am not the worse of it, and there was no fair lady in it to make you jealous."

"Jealous!" she cried, with a rapturous

smile of utter faith. Not all the fair ladies in the world could make me jealous, William. I know you too well."

"Thank you, Nellie," he said in a grateful, serious tone, raising one of her hands and kissing it. "No. The fact is, as I was waiting on the pier for the steamer, a little boy, about the age of the one I saw in my dream, about the age of young Layard, fell into the river, and as he was beyond the reach of the poles and too young to catch a line or life-buoy, and was in great danger of drowning, I jumped in and got him out."

With a sigh of horror she lay back in her chair unable to speak.

"It was a strange fulfilment of my dream. As you know, I am not in the least superstitious, but it seems to me that the nightmare I had last night was sent to me that I might be on the spot to save

that poor little chap from a watery grave. Don't look so terrified, Nellie. There was great danger for the little fellow, but not the slightest for me. I am as much at home in the water as a duck, and you see, being stout, I am buoyant and swim very high."

"O, but 'tis dreadful to think of you, William, in the water!" she whispered in a voice breathless with a combined feeling of dread of the peril he had been in and thankfulness for his present security.

"Well, it's all over now, and you needn't be afraid of my doing anything of the kind again. When I got out of the water I went and bought a dry suit of ready-made clothes, and I think you must admit I am quite a swell in them."

She forced a smile. He went on:

"Well, even all this wouldn't account for my being so late. You must know there

is nothing I hate so much as notoriety, and I had absolutely got to Waterloo on my way home when it suddenly occurred to me that as two or three hundred people saw the rescue some one might go to the newspapers with an account of it. Nothing could make me more shamefaced than to see my name in print in connection with this affair. I had experience of something of the kind at the time of the fire—you remember, dearest?"

She pressed his hand and said, "My own, my own, my own!"

"So I took a cab and drove round to all the newspaper-offices to bar a report going in. That was what kept me till this hour."

They sat talking for a little while longer, and then she rang for the maid and he went to the dressing-room.

The anxiety caused by his unexpected delay in town, or by the tale he had told

her, may have had an injurious effect on the invalid, or it may be that, without any exciting cause, the aggravation would have taken place; but at all events, that night, or, rather, early in the morning, Mrs. Crawford rang her bell, and upon her husband coming to her he found her so much worse that he set off at once for the doctor.

As he closed the front-door after him he whispered to himself, "I wonder is this more of my luck?"



CHAPTER V.

AN INTRUDER UPON THE AIT.

WHEN Kate Mellor found herself in the streets of Leeham that evening the light was beginning to fail. The clouds, which during the day had been thin and fleecy, had, as the hours went by, grown in extent and mass. They now hung above, fold over fold, dark, gloomy, threatening. The air was heavy, moist, oppressive. Not a breath of wind stirred.

The woman turned to the left, and, taking the tow-path, as she had one night before, set out in the direction of Welford. She wore her veil closely drawn over her disfigured face. Her step was more firm and elastic than in the afternoon. Then

she had been on her way to seek physical relief ; now she was on her way to alleviate her heart.

She left the tow-path by the approach at Welford, and gained the bridge. The usual group of loungers and loafers were there, but they took no notice of her. They could see by a glance at her that she was poor and miserable, and to be poor and miserable at Welford Bridge insured one against close observation or inquisitive speculation—it was to wear the uniform of the place.

She leaned against the parapet, and gazed at the canal side of Boland's Ait. Everything there was as usual: the floating stage being moored by the side of the islet, as it had been on the night she tried to draw it across the water.

She turned her eyes on the other side of the island, and started. She saw what she

had never seen before: the floating stage stretching across the water of the bay, making a bridge from one bank to the other. This discovery set her heart beating fast, for if one could only get on Crawford's Quay one could cross over the stage to the Ait.

Hitherto all her hopes had been centred on the stage lying along the islet on the canal side. Now the best chance of gaining the holm lay on the side of the bay.

Crawford's Quay was not used for purposes of trade now, all the buildings being vacant except the house in which Layard lived.

The daylight was almost gone, and the heavy banks of cloud shrouded earth in a dull deep gloom—a gloom deeper than that of clear midnight in this month of June.

Kate Mellor turned again to her left and

walked to the top of Crawford Street. She looked down it. All was dark except the one lamp burning like an angry eye at the bottom. As she was perfectly certain no one could recognise her, she went into Crawford Street without much trepidation. She kept on the left-hand side: the one opposite to Crawford's House.

The window of the sitting-room was fully open for air. In the room were four people: a man with a long beard, whom she did not know; a girl with golden-brown hair, whom she had more than once seen take Freddie from her husband at the end of the stage; and a second man, whom she could not see, for his back was towards her. And her husband. They were all just in the act of sitting down to supper.

She knew the place and the ways of the people thoroughly. She had studied nothing else for days and days.

“There is no one now on the island but the child, and they will be half-an-hour at supper ; they will not stir for half-an-hour ! Now is my chance, or never !”

Her heart throbbed painfully ; she was so excited that she tottered in her walk. She was afraid to run lest she should attract the attention of people passing along Welford Road at the top of the street.

Everything depended on speed. She had been down here twice before, and found that one of the staples of a padlock securing a gate had rusted loose in the jamb. Without the floating stage for a bridge, this discovery was useless ; without the absence of her husband from the island, or unless he was sunk in profound sleep, the loose staple and the stage-bridge would be of little avail. But here, owing to some extraordinary and beneficent freak, all three combined in her interest to-night !

Not a second was to be lost. Already she was working fiercely at the loose staple. It was rusted and worn, and the wood was decayed all round it, but still it clung to the post, as a loose tooth to the gum.

She seized it with both her hands, although there was hardly room for one hand, and swayed it this way and that until her breath came short and the blood trickled from her fingers.

No doubt it was yielding, but would it come away in time? She had not hours to accomplish the task. She had only minutes, and every minute lost was stolen from the time she might bend over her darling, watching, devouring his lovely face, and listening to his innocent breathing, and feeling his sweet baby breath upon her cheek!

O, this was horrible! Break iron! break wood! break fingers! break arm!

but let this poor distracted outcast mother into the presence of her child for the last time, for one parting sight, one parting kiss, in secret and fear!

At last the staple yielded and came away in her hand, and in another moment, after a few gratings and squealings which turned her cold, lest they should be heard, the unhappy mother forced open the door and passed through.

In another moment she was across the bridge and on the land which her love for her little one had made dearer to her from afar off than ever Canaan was to the desert-withered Israelites of old.

There was light enough to walk without stumbling. She knew the lie of the place as well as it could be learned without absolutely treading the ground. She took her way rapidly round the wall of the old timber-yard and then across the little open

space to the cottage. She observed no precaution now, but went on impetuously, headlong.

The door of the cottage was shut. She opened it by the latch, and, having entered, closed it after her. She did not pause to listen; she did not care whether there was any one in the place or not. She knew she was within reach of her child, and that she should be able to see him, to touch him, before she died. She was within arm's length of him, and she would touch him, though he was surrounded by levelled spears. The spears might pierce her bosom, but even though they did she could stretch out her hand and caress his head before the sense left her hand, the sight her eye.

She knew where to find the door of the room in which he slept, for the light she had seen the other night through the eye of Welford Bridge as she came along the tow-

path was burning, much dimmed, on the same window-sill now.

She opened the door and entered the room.

In the middle of the bed lay the child, half-naked. The heat of the night had made him restless, and he had kicked off the clothes.

With a long tremulous moan she flung herself forward on the bed, and, penning his little body within the circle of her arms, laid her disfigured face against his head and burst into tears.



CHAPTER VI.

HETTY'S VISIT TO THE AIT.

“AND so we have got you at last, and here is Mr. Ray, who will hardly believe you are really coming,” said Layard that evening, as Bramwell knocked at the back door and entered Crawford's house. “It is very good of you to make an exception in our favour.”

“All the goodness is on your side in inviting one who has been out of the world for so long a time. I know you will believe me when I say that now we are known to one another I am very glad to come.”

“There is nothing like breaking the ice, and let us hope for a phenomenon that the water below may be warm. You have no notion of what it is to be at the works all

day long and never exchange a word with a congenial soul. Then when I come home I do not think it fair to my sister to leave her alone. So my life is a little monotonous and dull; but now that I have made the acquaintance of you and Mr. Ray I mean to lead quite a riotous existence."

"You will, I know, excuse me if I do not stay long to-night. I must go back to the boy."

"You may go back now and then to see that all is well. But, after all, what is there to be afraid of?"

"Well, you know, I made an enemy to-day, and it might occur to him to revenge himself upon the child."

"But he can't get near the child. Your stage on the canal side is moored, Mr. Ray tells me, and we are here at this end of the other stage, and I don't think there is a small boat he could get on the whole canal.

Besides, how is he to know but you are at home? I am sure you may make your mind quite easy."

"Still, if you allow me, I shall go early."

"You may go early to see that all is safe, but we will not let you say good-night until you are quite tired of us. Come in: Mr. Ray and my sister are in the front room."

Layard had purposely delayed a little while in the passage. He was a most affectionate and sympathetic brother, and he did not know but that the two people in the front room might have something to say to one another.

They had, but it did not seem matter of great interest or importance.

"Miss Layard," said Philip Ray when her brother had left the room, "you told me you never were on Boland's Ait."

"Never," she answered.

“Mr. Bramwell is certain to be anxious about the boy, and it would be a great kindness if you would go over the stage and see that all is well.”

“I! what? Do you mean in the dark?” she said, looking at him in astonishment.

“Well, Miss Layard, I thought you had more courage than to be afraid of a little darkness; but if you did feel anything like timidity, rather than that Mr. Bramwell should remain uneasy, I would go with you and show you the way. What do you say to that?”

She said nothing, but, bending her head over her stitching, blushed until her bent neck grew pink under her golden-brown hair.

He did not insist upon an answer. Apparently he felt satisfied. In a moment the door opened, and Layard and Bramwell came in.

Although the lamp-light in the room was not particularly strong, for a moment Bramwell was dazzled and confused. He had not been in so bright a room since his retirement from the world. Although the furniture was faded and infirm, it was splendid compared with that in his cottage. Then there were a few prints upon the walls in gilt frames, and curtains to the window, and pieces of china and an ornamental clock on the chimney-piece, and a square of carpet in the middle of the floor, and a bright cover on the table, not one thing of the like being on Boland's Ait.

There was, too, an atmosphere of humanity about the place which did not find its way to the island; here was a sense of human interest, human contact, human sympathy wholly wanting in his home. Bramwell had come from the cell of an anchorite to a festival of man.

But above all else and before all else was the tall, lithe, bright-faced, blooming girl, with plenteous hair and blue eyes, in which there were glints of gold, and the ready smile and white teeth that showed between her moist red lips when she spoke. This was the first lady Bramwell had spoken to or met since his exile from the world, and she was beautiful enough for a goddess—a Hebe.

Was this, he asked himself, the dream of a captive, and should he wake to find himself once more mured between his white-washed walls, environed by silence and bound by the hideous fetters of a bond which was a horror and a disgrace? Should he wake up as he had awakened every morning for three years, to think of his ruined home, his blighted life, and his wife, who, though living, was dead for ever to him, and yet with her dead and infamous

hand held him back from taking a new companion, to be to him what he had hoped she would be when he took her in all love and faith?

No—all this was true. The talk and the laughter were true. His own talk and laughter were true; and, above all, this radiant girl, with her quick wit and beautiful intelligence and sympathy, was true. All true—and he was no more than thirty years of age! A young man. A man no older than the youngest girl might marry. Philip had told him that this girl was twenty. Why, twenty and thirty were just the ages for bride and bridegroom!

And how different was this girl from the other! Here was no vanity, no craving for admiration, no airs and graces, and, above all, here were the swift responsive spirit, the keen sympathy, the aspiring spirit, the exquisite sensibility!

Ay, and it was all true, and it was allowable for him to dream, for he was free. Free as he had been when, carried away by the mere beauty of face and form, he had asked nothing but physical beauty, believing that he could inform it with the soul of a goddess, until he found that the physical beauty was clay, which would commingle with no noble essence, which preferred a handful of trinkets or an oath of hollow homage to all the stirring tumults of the poets or the intense aspirings of the lute! Yes, he could be a poet under the influence of such a deity. He could sing if those ears would only listen; he could succeed if those lips would only applaud!

He took no heed of time; it slipped away like dry sand held in the hand. He never could tell afterwards what the conversation had been about, but he knew he was talking fast and well. Never in all his life had he

spoken under such an intoxicating spell as that of new hope springing in the presence of this girl. It was intoxication on an intellectual ether. His blood was fire and dew. His ideas were flame. The human voices around him were the music of eternal joy. There was in his spirit a sacred purpose that defied definition. He seemed to be praying in melody. He was upheld by the purpose of an all-wise beneficence now revealed to him for the first time ; he was transported out of himself and carried into converse with justified angels.

Philip Ray sat in amazed silence at the transformation. It was more wonderful than the miracle of Pygmalion's statue : it was the enchantment of emancipation, the delirium of liberty. He had known and honoured—nay, worshipped—this man for years, but until to-night he had never suspected that he was a genius and a demi-god.

He had known him as a martyr, but until this night he had never realised that he was a saint.

“I must go,” at length said Bramwell, rising. “I have already stayed too long.”

“No, no,” said Philip Ray, springing up, “you must not stir yet. This is doing you all the good in the world. I have asked Miss Layard to have a look at the island, and she will see to the boy. You cannot deny her this little gratification. We arranged it before you came. You are here now, and you must do what you are told. I will take her safely over the bridge and back, and then we shall have another chat.”

Hetty rose with a heightened colour.

“Pray sit down, Mr. Bramwell; we will bring you back news of the boy. It is much too early to think of leaving, and we are afraid that if once you went across to-night you would not come back again.

Now that we have got you we will not let you go."

Layard passed his hand over his bearded mouth to conceal a smile. He guessed the object of Ray's proposal.

"Mr. Bramwell," he said earnestly, "you must not think of stirring."

He rose, and, placing his hands on the other's shoulders, gently forced him back on his chair.

"I am giving you too much trouble, Miss Layard," Bramwell said, with a smile; "but if I must stay and you will go, there is nothing for it but to submit."

His real reason for yielding so readily was the intense pleasure it gave him to find that she took such an interest in his boy.

"Put the lamp in the kitchen-window, Miss Layard," said Philip, when the two found themselves in the back passage.

“The light will be useful in crossing the stage.”

She did as she was bidden, and rejoined him on Crawford's Quay, just outside the back door, which they left open so as to get the benefit of the hall-light.

“Give me your hand now,” said he, and he led her across the floating bridge. “You had better leave me your hand still,” he said when they were on the Ait. “It is very dark, and I know the place thoroughly. What do you think of Mr. Bramwell?”

“I think him simply wonderful. I never heard anything like him before. Does he always talk as he did to-night?”

“No; still he usually talks well. But though I have been very intimate with him for many years I never heard him talk so well. As a rule he speaks with great caution, but to-night he threw reserve to the winds and let himself go.”

“I think I can manage now without your help,” she said, endeavouring to withdraw her hand.

“I should be very sorry to believe anything of the kind,” said he, preventing her. “You had better leave me your hand for a little while.”

She bent her head and ceased her effort.

“Miss Layard,” he said, after a moment’s pause, “I want you to do me a great favour. Will you?”

“If I can,” she said in a very low voice, so low that he had to bend towards her to catch it.

“In the dark and the daylight leave me your hand. Give it to me for ever.”

“But the boy?” she said. “We must go see the boy.”

She made a slight attempt to release her hand. He closed his fingers round it.

“We shall go see the boy presently.”

They were now standing at the tail of the Ait. "I have your hand now, Hetty darling, and I mean to keep it. I have loved you since the first time I saw you, and I never loved any other woman. You will give me your hand, dear, and yourself, dear, and I will give you my heart and soul for all my life. You will give me your hand, dear?"

She did not take it away.

Then he let it go himself, and, putting his arms carefully round her, folded her gently to his breast, and said, with a broken sob :

"Merciful Heaven, this is more than any man deserves. May I kiss you, dear?"

"Yes."

Her head was leaning on his shoulder. He bent down and kissed her forehead.

"I'm glad there's no light, dear."

"Why?"

"Because if I saw you I could not believe this is true. Hetty."

“What?”

“Nothing, dear. I only wanted to hear your voice, so that I might be sure this is you.”

He put his hand on her head.

“Is that your hair, dear?”

“Yes.”

“I can’t believe it. And do you think you will grow fond of me?”

“No fonder than I am, Philip. I could not be any fonder than I am.”

“This is not to be believed. So that when I come into the room where you are it makes you glad?”

“It gives me such gladness as I never knew before, nor ever thought of.”

“This is not to be believed.”

“And when you go away I feel so lonely and desolate.”

“Do not tell me any more, or I shall hate myself for causing you pain.”

“But I would rather feel the pain than be without it. And I’d give you my life, Philip, if you wanted it. I mean I’d go to death for you, Philip ; and I’d follow you all round the world, if you wanted it—all round the world, if you would only look back at me now and then.”

“You must not say such things, child.”

“But they are true.”

“I had hoped, dear, but I had not hoped so much as this—nothing like so much as this, and I cannot bear to hear you say so much. Listening to it makes me seem to have done you an injury.”

“And I’d do everything that you told me. I’d even go away.”

“Hush, child, hush ! It is not right to say such things.”

“But they are true. I’d go away and live alone with my heart if you told me, Philip. Now don’t you see that I love you?”

“I do, dear. But now I see how much less my love is than yours, for I could not go away and live alone with my heart.”

“I could. Shall we see to the boy now?”

“Yes.”



CHAPTER VII.

BY THE BOY'S BEDSIDE.

KATE MELLOR, lying beside her child on the bed, suddenly became aware of footsteps approaching the cottage along the canal face of the island. She had been fondling and talking to Frank, and he was now half awake.

Between the bed and the wall there was the space of a foot. The mother slipped down through this space to the floor, and there lay in terror, trying to hush her breathing and still the beatings of her heart. She could not tell herself exactly what it was she dreaded more than discovery. Her fears took no definite form.

The footsteps came up to the cottage,

and then stopped. Through the open window sounded voices, the voices of a man and a girl. As the concealed woman listened her heart stood still, for she recognised the male voice as that of her brother.

“Go in, Hetty,” said the male voice, “and I’ll wait for you here. The room is on the left-hand side.”

“You won’t come in?” asked the girl.

“No. Of course all is right. If you speak in the room I shall hear you.”

The girl came into the cottage, opened the door of the sleeping-room, and approached the bed.

“Mother,” said the boy, who was now covered up.

The concealed woman grew cold with fear.

“Are you awake, Frank?”

“Yes, mother,” said the boy, stretching

himself, yawning, and rubbing his eyes. "Are you going to take me away again? If you do, take Freddie too."

"I'm not your mother, Frank. Don't you know me?" said the girl.

"You said you were my mother, and I know you are, though you have spots on your face."

"Rouse up, Frank," said the girl in a tone of alarm. "Look at me. Who am I? Don't you know me?"

"You're mother, and you said you'd take me away to Mrs. Pemberton's, only father wouldn't let you," said the boy, with another yawn.

There sounded a tumult in the ears of the mother, and she thought she should go mad if she did not scream out.

The visitor went to the window and spoke to the man outside. "The child has been dreaming, and fancies I'm his mother."

“Heaven forbid!”

“Why?”

“His mother is not to be spoken of. His mother was the basest, the worst woman that ever lived. She, fortunately for herself and every one else, died a little while ago. You are not to mention her name, dear. It sullies wherever it is uttered.”

The hiding woman shrank into herself as if struck by an icy blast. Was it thus she deserved to be spoken of by her only brother? Yes—yes—yes! As the basest, the worst woman who ever lived? whose name sullied the place in which it was uttered? O yes—yes—yes! It was true! Too true!

The boy's eyes were now wide open, and he was looking at the tall slender figure of the girl standing out black against the lamp in the window.

"Aunt Hetty."

"That's my own boy. Now you know me," said the girl in a soothing and encouraging tone as she went back to the bed.

"Aunt Hetty, where's mother gone?"

"She wasn't here, Frank. You were only dreaming."

"O, but I wasn't. I saw her. She lay down beside me on the bed, and she had red spots on her face."

The girl shuddered.

The woman gasped and felt as if her heart would burst through her ribs.

"Philip," said the girl, once more going to the window, "I don't like this at all. I think the child must be a little feverish. He says his mother was here, and that she lay down beside him on the bed, and that she has spots on her face. What do you say ought to be done?"

“Nothing at all. Get the child to sleep if you can. As you say, he has been dreaming.”

“But, indeed, I don’t like it. He’s so very circumstantial. He says his mother told him she’d take him back to Mrs. Pemberton’s, only his father wouldn’t let her. Who is Mrs. Pemberton?”

“I don’t know. Some lodging-house keeper, no doubt.”

“Well, I don’t know what ought to be done. There is no chance of the child going to sleep soon, and either he is raving or—or—or—” the girl’s voice trembled—“something very dreadful indeed has occurred here. The child cannot certainly be left alone now.” She looked around her with apprehension. She was pale and trembling.

“You seem uneasy, Hetty.”

“I am terrified.”

“I assure you the child has been dreaming, that is all. It is quite a common thing, I have read, for children to believe what they see in dreams has real existence.”

“O, talking in that way is no use. I am miserable and frightened out of my wits, Philip.”

“What would you wish me to do?”

“I think you had better go for Mr. Bramwell.”

“Very well.”

“But no—no—no, I should die of fright. What should I do if *that* came again and lay down on the bed beside the child?” moaned the girl in terror and despair.

“You really ought not to think of anything so much out of reason. There was nothing in it but the uneasy dream of a child.”

“Indeed, indeed I shall go frantic. Can nothing be done?”

“Well, you know, I could not think of letting you cross over the stage by yourself. Nothing on earth would induce me to let you attempt such a thing. And you do not wish me to go away, and you will not have the two of us go. I cannot see any way out of the difficulty.”

“O dear, O dear, O dear!” cried the girl. “I shall go crazy! Stop! I have it. Didn’t we leave the back door open?”

“We did, so as to have the benefit of the hall-lamp.”

“Well, you stay here and watch the boy, and I’ll go and call for Mr. Bramwell across the bay. They will hear my voice easily in the dining-room. That’s the best plan, isn’t it?”

“Yes, if any plan is wanted, which I doubt.”

The girl ran out of the room with a shudder.

The concealed woman had fainted. She lost consciousness when it was decided to summon her husband without watch being removed from the room.

As Hetty passed Ray he caught her for a moment and said, "Mind, on no account whatever are you to attempt to cross the stage by yourself. If you cannot make yourself heard, dear, won't you come back to me?"

"O, I promise; but please let me go. I am beside myself with terror."

He loosed his hold, and in a minute she disappeared round the corner of the old timber yard. Philip Ray went up to the window, and with his face just above the sill kept guard. He heard her call eagerly two or three times, and then he caught the sound of a response. After that he knew a brief and hurried conversation was held, and then came footsteps, and

the form of Bramwell hastening along the wharf.

“You are to go to Miss Layard at once and take her over. She would not come back. She is fairly scared. She told me all that has happened here. Run to her, and get her away from this place quickly. Good-night.”

“It is nothing at all. The boy has had a nightmare.”

“Nothing more? Do not delay. Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

The father then went into the cottage, and, having bolted the outer door, stole softly to the room where little Frank lay.

The child was wide awake.

“Well, my boy,” said the father, kissing him tenderly, and soothing the child’s dark hair with a gentle hand. “So your Aunt Hetty has been to see you.”

"Yes, and mother too."

"That was a dream, Frank, and you mustn't think any more about it."

The boy shook his head on the pillow. "No dream," he said. "She lay down on the bed there beside me, and put her arms round me like at Mrs. Pemberton's, where we lived before I came here; and she cried like at Mrs. Pemberton's, and I asked her to take me back to Mrs. Pemberton's, and she said she would, only you wouldn't let me go. Won't you let me go?"

"We'll see in the morning."

"And won't Aunt Hetty let Freddie come too? for I had no little boy to play with at Mrs. Pemberton's."

"We'll talk to Aunt Hetty about it."

"And mother has spots, red spots, on her face now, and there used to be no spots. And why won't you let me go? for I love my mother more than I love you."

“We’ll talk about all that in the morning; but it is very late now, and all good little boys are asleep.”

“And all good fathers and mothers asleep too?”

“Well, yes; most of them.”

“And why aren’t you asleep?”

“Because I’m not sleepy. But as you have had a dream that woke you I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll move the stretcher away, and sit down beside you and hold your hand until you go to sleep again.” He did as he said, and when he had the little hand within his own he said, “Now, shut your eyes and go to sleep.”

“Father.”

“Yes, my child?”

“Didn’t you know mother once?”

“Yes, my boy.”

“A long time ago?”

“A long time ago.”

“And when you knew her she had no ugly red spots over her face?”

“No, child.”

“Well, she has now—all over her face.”

“Go to sleep like a good boy. I will not talk to you any more. Good-night.”

“Good-night;” and with one little hand under his cheek and the other clasped lightly in his father’s, little Frank lay still awhile, and then fell off into tranquil slumber.

For a long time the father sat motionless. He was afraid to stir lest he might wake the little fellow. His mind went back to the evening he had just spent. How bright and cheerful it had been compared with the loneliness and gloom of those evenings with which he had been so long sadly familiar!

What a charming girl that was, and how she had brightened up the whole evening

with her enchanting presence! What a home her presence would make! He had admired her as he had seen her on Crawford's Quay with little Freddie, but then she was bending her mind down to a child's level. That night he had seen her among men, the perfect complement of them, and the flower of womanhood. He felt his face, his whole being soften when he thought of her. Even to think of her was to feel the influence of a gracious spirit.

She was twenty and he was only thirty—who knows!

And then his head fell forward on his chest, and he slept. But Hetty followed him into his sleep—into his dreams.

He was walking along a country road in May, dejected and broken-spirited, thinking of the miserable past three years, when suddenly at a turning he met Hetty holding his boy by the hand and coming to meet

him. And then, with a laugh, he knew that all these three years which tortured him so cruelly had been nothing but a dream, and that this sweet and joyous and perfect Hetty had been the wife of his young manhood. With outstretched arms and a cry he rushed to meet her.

The cry awoke him, and he looked up.

Between the bed and the wall rose a thin black figure sharp against the white of the wall, and above the figure a pale haggard face dabbled with large red spots like gouts of blood.

With a shriek of horror he sprang to his feet and flung himself against the wall farthest from this awful apparition.

“In the name of God, who or what are you?”

“Nothing to you, I know, except a curse and a blight, but *his* mother,” pointing to the child.

“Living?”

“I could not die.”

He thrust both arms upward with a gesture of desperate appeal. “Merciful God! am I mad?”



CHAPTER VIII.

BRAMWELL FINDS A SISTER.

THE sound of the voices had awakened the child, and he sat up in the bed, looking with wide-open eyes from father to mother, from mother to father.

Bramwell stood with his back against the wall, staring at his wife and breathing hard. He was stunned, overwhelmed. He felt uncertain of his own identity, of the place around him, and of the child. The only thing of which he felt sure was that he stood face to face with his wife, who had risen from the tomb.

“I did not come,” she said, moving out from her position between the bed and the wall, “to see you or to ask mercy or for-

givenness of you. You need not reproach me for being alive ; because only I fainted, you should not have seen me to-night ; you should never have seen me again, for I was on my way to my grave, where I could not go without looking on my child once more. The announcement of my death came only a little while before its time. I shall not see another day."

Her voice was dull and hoarse, the features wasted and pinched, and mottled with marring blotches of scorbutic red.

"This is no place for us to talk," he said, pointing to the child on the bed. "Follow me."

She hesitated.

"I do not want to talk with you ; I wish to spare you. I know you would be justified in killing me. But I would not have you suffer because you wish me dead. I shall not trouble you or the world with

another day of my wretched life. Cover your face, and let me kiss the boy again, and I will go. I know my way to the river, and I would spare you any harm that might come to you of my dying here—at your hands.”

“This is no place, I say, for such a scene or for such words. Follow me.”

“You will not kill me?”

“I will not harm you, poor soul.”

“Your pity harms me worse than blows.”

“Then I will not pity you. Come.”

“May I kiss the child once more before I leave the room? You may cover your eyes, so that you may not see your child polluted by my touch.”

“You will be free to kiss him when we have done our talk. I shall not hinder you.”

He held the door open for her, and, with tottering steps and bent head, she went out into the dark and waited for him.

“Lie down now, my child, and try to go to sleep. Mother will come to you later.”

The child, overawed, covered himself up and closed his eyes. Bramwell took the lamp off the window-sill, and led the way into the sitting-room.

He shut the door behind them, put the lamp on the table, and, setting a chair for her by it, bade her sit down. She complied in silence, resting her elbow on the table, and covering her face with her hand.

“You said you fainted,” he said; “do you feel weak still?”

“A little.”

“I keep some brandy in case of sudden illness, for this is a lonely place.” It was a relief to him to utter commonplaces. “And there are, or at least were until lately, no neighbours of whom I could borrow.”

He poured some out of a pocket-flask, and

added water, and handed the glass to her.

“Drink that.”

“What! You will give me aid under your roof?”

“Under the roof of Heaven. Drink.”

She raised the glass to her lips, and swallowed a small quantity.

“All. Drink it all. You have need of it.”

She did as she was told.

He began walking up and down the room softly.

“You sent me the boy when you believed you were dying, and when the crisis turned in favour of life you inserted the announcement of your death in order that I might believe myself free of you for ever?”

“Yes. I intended you should never see me or hear of me again.”

“That I might be free to marry again if I chose?”

“That was my idea.”

“And then you came to bid good-bye to your child before going to the river?”

“Yes; they never would have found out who I was. I left all papers behind me, and cut the marks off my clothes.”

“But the love of your child was so strong, you risked everything to bid him a last farewell?”

“I am his mother, and all that is left to me of a heart is in my child. I do not ask you to forgive me for the past. I do not ask your pardon for what I did three years ago; but I do entreat you, as you are a just and merciful man, to forgive me for coming to see my innocent little child!”

She took her hand from before her face, and, clasping both her hands together, raised them in passionate supplication to him as he passed her in his walk. Her thick, dull voice was full of unutterable woe.

“I forgive you the past and the present utterly. Say no more in that strain. My head is very heavy, and I am trying to think. Do not excite yourself about forgiveness. I am endeavouring to see my way. This has come suddenly and unexpectedly, and my brain seems feeble, and it will not work freely. In a little while all will be plain to me. In the meantime keep quiet.”

He spoke very gently.

She groaned and covered her face again. She would have preferred the river to this, but the manner of the man compelled obedience as she had never felt obedience compelled before, and it was obvious he did not wish her to go to the river—yet, at all events.

“It was a terrible risk to run—a terrible risk. Suppose I had married?”

“But I never would have interfered with you, or come near you, or let you know I

was alive. You were the last being on earth I wanted to see." She took her hand down from before her face and looked at him earnestly.

"I am sure of that, but you see what has fallen out to-night."

"O, forgive me, and let me go! My lot is bitter enough for what has happened, without reproaches for something that has not occurred. You have not married again? Have you?"

He shook his head, and said with a mournful smile, "No. I have not married again. Well, let that pass. Let that pass. Mentioning it helps me to clear up matters—enables me to see my way."

"May I go now?"

"Not yet. Stay awhile."

"I would rather be in the river than here."

"So would I; but I must not go for many

reasons. There is the child, for example, to go no Higher."

"But I can be of no use to the child. Your coldness is killing me. Why don't you rage at me or let me go? Are you a man of stone? or do you take me for a woman of stone?" she cried passionately, writhing on her chair.

He waved her outburst aside with a gentle gesture. "Nothing can be gained by heat or haste."

"Let me say good-bye to my child and go," she cried vehemently.

"The child and the river can bide awhile; bide you also awhile. It is a long time since we last met."

She grasped her throat with her hand. She was on the point of breaking down. His last words pierced her to the soul. With a superhuman effort she controlled herself and sat silent.

For a minute there was silence. He continued his walk up and down. Gradually his footfalls, which had been light all along, grew fainter and fainter until they became almost inaudible. Gradually his face, which had been perplexed, lost its troubled look and softened into a peaceful smile. It seemed as though he had ceased to be aware of her presence. He looked like a solitary man communing with himself and drawing solace from his thoughts. He looked as though he beheld some beatific vision that yielded heavenly content—as though a voice of calming and elevating melody were reaching him from afar off. When he spoke his tones were fine and infinitely tender, and sounded like a benediction. He saw his way clearly now.

“ You risked everything to-night to get a glimpse of your child, a final look, to say a last farewell. You were willing to risk

everything here ; you were willing to risk hereafter everything that may be the fate of those who lay violent hands upon their own lives. Why need you risk anything at all, either for the boy's sake or in the hereafter, because of laying violent hands upon your life ? ”

“ I do not understand you,” she whispered, looking at him in awe. His appearance, his manner, his voice, did not seem of earth.

“ Why not stay with your boy and fill your heart with him ? ”

“ What ? ” she whispered, growing faint and catching the table for support.

“ Why not stay with your boy and fill your heart with ministering to him ? ”

“ What ? Here ? In this place ? ” she cried in a wavering voice, still no louder than a whisper.

“ In this place. Why should you not

stay with your child? There is no one so fit to tend and guard a little child as a mother."

"And you?" she asked in a wild intense whisper. "Will you go to the river to hide the head I have dishonoured?"

"No. I too will stay and help you to shield and succour the child. Mother and father are the proper guardians of little ones."

"Frank Mellor, are you mad?" she cried out loud, springing to her feet and dashing her hand across her face to clear her vision.

"No; there isn't substance enough in me now to make a madman."

"And," she cried, starting up and facing him, "Frank Mellor, do you know who I am? Do you know that three years ago I left your house under infamous circumstances, and that I brought shame and

sorrow and destruction upon your home and you? Do you know that I have made you a byeword in Beechley and London, and wherever you have been heard of? Do you know that I am your *wife*?"

She had raised her hoarse voice to its highest pitch. Her eyes flashed. She brandished her arms. Her face blazed red in the undisfigured parts, and the red spots turned purple and livid. She was frantically defending the magnanimity of this man against the baseness of her former self, against the evil of her present reputation, against contact with the leprosy of her sin.

"All that needs to be known, I know," he said, in the same calm, gentle voice. "Years ago I lost my wife. I lost sight of her for a long time. To-night I find a sister."

"Sister!" she cried in a whisper, sinking

on a chair, and losing at once all her fierce aspect and enhanced colour.

“To-night I find a sister who is in despair because of the loss of her child. I restore her child to her empty arms, and I say, ‘My roof is your roof, and my bread is your bread.’” He lit a candle, and handed it to her. “Go to your room where the boy is, and take him in your arms, for it comforts a mother to have her child in her arms. I shall stay here. It is dawn already, and I have work to do. Good-night.”



CHAPTER IX.

“I MUST GO TO FETCH HER HOME.”

WHEN Philip Ray left Crawford's House that night he felt anything at all but the elation supposed to be proper in the accepted suitor of a beautiful girl. He had, indeed, a great many troubles in his mind, and as he walked home to his lonely lodgings in Camberwell he was nearly a miserable man. It would not be true to say he was out and out miserable, but he was perilously close to it.

In the first place, he had to leave Hetty behind him, a thing almost beyond endurance. Then, when removed from the intoxicating influence of her presence and undistracted by the magic of her beauty,

he began to turn his eyes inward upon himself, and investigate his own unworthiness with brutal candour—nay, with gross injustice.

What on earth was he that a faultless, an exquisite creature like Hetty should give herself to him? That was a question he asked himself over and over again, without being able to find any reason whatever for her sacrifice. More than once he felt inclined to go back, make a clean breast of it by telling her that as a friend he would recommend her to have nothing whatever to do with himself. The words of love and devotion she had spoken to him on the island were a source of intense pain to him. A nice kind of fellow *he* was indeed for her to say *she* would follow round all the world! He was obtaining love under false pretences, that's what he was doing. And such love! and from such a perfect

creature ! It was simply a monstrous fraud ! There was something underhand and dishonourable about it ; for if she had only known him for what he was, she would flee out of the very parish away from him. He must have been mad to ask her to marry him.

It had all come on him suddenly. When he suggested that she should go to the island with him on the excuse of seeing how the boy got on, he had no intention of proposing to her ; and, nevertheless, no sooner had he set foot on the Ait than he must retain her hand and ask her to give it to him for ever ! Could he have meant the whole thing as a joke, or was the Master of all Evil at the bottom of it ?

But the full turpitude of his act did not appear until he considered ways and means. At present his salary was barely enough to keep himself in the strictest economy. He

could not, after paying for food, lodgings, and clothes all on the humblest scale, save five pounds a year. It is true he had a yearly increase of salary, and by-and-by would have the chance of promotion. But at the most favourable estimate he could not hope to have an income on which he might prudently marry sooner than between twenty and thirty years. Say, in twenty-five years, when his salary would be sufficient, he would be fifty-two and she forty-five! If he had any hair left on his head then it would be snow-white, and he would be sure to have rheumatism and most likely a touch of asthma as well. He would have confirmed bachelor habits and exacting notions about his food and an abject horror of the east wind. He would tell old stories as new, and laugh at them, and the younger men in the office would laugh at him for laughing at these old tales,

and mimic him behind his back, and call him an old fossil and other endearing names, indicative of pity in them and senility in him ! What a poor idiot he had been to speak to the girl !

It was true the Layards were not very well off themselves now ; but they had once been rich, and naturally Hetty ought to be raised by marriage far up above their present position. She was a lady and a beauty, and the most enchanting girl that ever the sun shone on, and ought to wear a coronet if such things went by charm ; and here was he, a pauper junior clerk in one of the most miserably-paid branches of the Civil Service, coolly asking her to be his wife ! His conduct had been criminal, nothing short of it.

What on earth would Frank say when he told him of it ? If Frank was an honourable man he would go over to Layard, and

advise the brother to forbid the suitor his house.

Suitor, indeed! Pretty suitor he was to go wooing such a girl as Hetty!

But then Hetty had told him she loved him and would follow him to the ends of the earth, and he'd just like to hear any man in *his* presence say Hetty wasn't to do what she pleased, even if her pleasure took such a preposterous form as love for him. Now that he came to think of it in that way, if it pleased Hetty to love him she should love him, in spite of all the Franks and all the brothers in Christendom; for wasn't Hetty's happiness and pleasure dearer to him than the welfare of empires? And if he hadn't quite a hundred a year, he could make it more by coaching fellows for the Civil Service and in a thousand other ways.

Philip Ray having arrived at this more

hopeful and wholesome view of his affairs went to bed, and lay awake some time trying to compose a poem in his sweetheart's praise. Having found, however, that he could not keep the lines of equal length, and that the rhymes came in now at the wrong places and anon not at all, he abandoned poetry as an occupation with which he had no familiarity, and took to one in which he had experience—sleep.

When he awoke next morning all his troubles and doubts had cleared away. The lead of the night before had been transmuted into gold by the alchemy of sleep. He seemed to himself really a fairly good fellow (which was no egotistical overestimate, but a very fair appraisalment of his value). No insuperable difficulties presented themselves in his mind to the making thirty, forty, fifty pounds a year more than his salary. He knew Hetty loved him, and

he simply adored his exquisite jocund Hebe with the rich heart and frank avowal of love. A fig for obstacles with such a prize before him! If any considerable sum of money was attached to the setting of the Thames on fire, here was your man able and willing to undertake the feat.

When the afternoon came, and he found himself released from the drudgery of his desk, he hastened to Welford. Alfred Layard did not get home in the evening until eight o'clock, and, of course, Ray could not call at Crawford's House until after that hour. But he could go to the Ait, and who could say but Hetty might appear at a window, or even come out on Crawford's Quay? In any case he wanted to see Frank and tell him what he had done, for he would as soon have thought of picking a pocket as of keeping a secret from his brother-in-law.

Philip Ray hastened along the canal with long quick strides, swinging his arms as he went. Now that the prospect of seeing Hetty again was close upon him he had not only lost all his gloom, but was in a state of enthusiastic hopefulness. He hailed the island three times before Bramwell answered.

“I thought you were never coming,” said he, as the two shook hands upon his landing.

“I was busy when you hailed,” said Bramwell, “and I could not believe it was you so early.” Then noticing the excitement of his brother-in-law, he said, “What is the matter? Has anything happened?”

“Yes. Let us go in. I want to talk to you most particularly,” said Ray. Then in his turn noticing the appearance and manner of the other, he said, “What is the matter with *you*? *You* too look as if something had happened.”

"I have been up all night at work," he answered, as they entered the cottage.

Ray's sister had gone to Mrs. Pemberton's to get the luggage she had left there.

They went into the sitting-room. Frank was playing by himself in the old timber-yard.

"Now, what is your news?" asked Bramwell, feeling sick at the thought that it must be something about Ainsworth.

Ray fidgeted on his chair. He found it more easy to say to himself, "I must tell Frank at once," than to accomplish the design now that the two were face to face. He hummed and hawed, and loosed his collar by thrusting his finger between his neck and the band of his shirt, but no words came. At last he got up and began walking about nervously.

"What is it, Philip? Can I do anything

for you?" asked Bramwell, in a placid voice and with a quiet smile.

"No, thank you, Frank, I've done it all myself. I've done all that man could do."

Bramwell turned pale; seizing the arms of his chair, he said apprehensively, "You don't mean to say you have met Ainsworth, and——"

"No—no—no!"

Bramwell threw himself back, infinitely relieved.

"The fact is I have made a fool of myself."

"In what way, Philip?"

"You know my income?"

Bramwell nodded.

"Well, it may as well come out first as last. I—don't start, and pray, pray don't laugh at me—I've fallen in love."

Bramwell nodded again and looked grave.

"And I have proposed."

Bramwell looked pained.

"And have been accepted."

"There is no chance whatever of my knowing anything of the lady?" said Bramwell in a tone implying that the answer must be in the negative.

"There is. You do. I proposed last night on this island to Miss Layard, and she has accepted me."

"Merciful heavens!" cried the other man, springing to his feet.

Ray paused and stared at his brother-in-law. "Why, what on earth is the matter with you, Frank? There is nothing so very shocking or astonishing in it, is there? I know for a man in my position it was rash, almost mad, to do such a thing. But there is nothing to make you look scared. Tell me why you are so astonished and shocked? If I told you I had shot Ainsworth you couldn't look more alarmed."

“I’ll tell you later—not now. Go on with your story, Philip. When you know all you will see why I was startled. It has nothing to do with you. I wish you and Miss Layard all the happiness that can fall to the lot of mortals; but I need scarcely tell you that, my dear, dear Philip.”

“I know it, Frank. You need not tell me you wish me well. You’re the most generous-hearted fellow alive. You have suffered cruel wrong through my blood, but never through me personally. Yet I believe if I had done you a personal wrong you would shake my hand and wish me well all the same. I believe if you yourself had thought of Hetty, and she chose me, you would be just as cordial in your good wishes as you are now.”

“I should indeed,” said Bramwell, with a strange light in his eyes. “And now tell me the rest of your story.”

Again he shook his brother-in-law warmly by both hands, and then sat down.

"There is nothing else to tell. When we came over here to see about the boy last night I asked her to be my wife, and she consented. By the way, how did he get on after I left?"

"For a while his rest was broken," said Bramwell, with a wan smile, "but after that he slept perfectly till it was time to get up."

"I knew the child was only dreaming. But Hetty"—yes, he had called her Hetty to his brother-in-law: how incomparably rich this made him feel!—"but Hetty was fairly terrified, and I thought it better to give way to her. It was nothing but a nightmare or a dream."

"Do you know, I am not so sure of that, Philip?"

"So sure of what?" asked the other

man, drawing down his straight eyebrows over his eyes, and peering into Bramwell's face, looking for symptoms of incipient insanity.

"That it was all a dream," answered the other, returning his gaze.

"Are you mad?" cried Ray, drawing back, and regarding his companion with severe displeasure.

"That is the second time I have been asked the same question within the past twenty-four hours. Do you know who the other person was who asked me that question?"

"Who?"

"Kate."

"O, he is mad!" cried Ray, stopping in his walk and surveying Bramwell with pity and despair.

The other went on, quietly looking his brother-in-law in the face steadily.

"The crisis of that disease went in her favour. She inserted that announcement of her death in order that I might feel myself free to marry if I chose. On her way to the River she came to this place to get one more sight of her child. I found her here——"

"And you forgave her?" said Ray, in a breathless voice.

"Yes."

"Why?" fiercely.

"Because I thought it would be well for her to be near her child. And she is to stay here——"

"Here? With you? You do not mean to say you will meet her day after day for evermore?"

"Why not? She had nowhere else to go to—except the River."

"But he will come again, and she will leave you."

“No, no. He will not come again. Her beauty is gone for ever.”

“Her beauty gone for ever! How came that to be?”

“The illness marked her for life.”

“And yet she may stay?”

“Why not? Will it not comfort her to be near her child?”

“O, Frank, you make all other men look small!”

“I said I would tell you why I started and cried out a while ago. Last night, when I believed myself free, I thought I might speak to Miss Layard——”

“O, my brother! O, this is the cruellest blow that ever fell on man! My heart is breaking for you.”

“I did not know last night that your mind was set on Miss Layard.”

“Do not speak of me.”

"Boland's Ait!" cried a voice from without.

"Hark!" said Bramwell, holding up his finger. "That is Kate's voice. I must go to fetch her home."



CHAPTER X.

CRAWFORD'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

DR. LOFTUS pronounced Mrs. Crawford's condition to be very serious. He told her husband he did not expect a fatal termination immediately, but that in such cases there was no knowing what might happen, and it would be prudent that all preparations should be made for the worst. Above all, any violent shock was to be guarded against. There was now, he thought, absolutely no hope of improvement. If she felt equal to it, she might get up, and be wheeled about in her chair. In reply to Crawford's inquiry, the doctor could not tell how far off the end might be—hours, days, weeks.

“Months?”

“Scarcely.”

When the doctor was gone Crawford sat a long time in deep thought. It was daylight now, and he lay down on a couch in his own room to ponder over the whole affair. The income of the property would be lost to him on her death. The three thousand pounds of savings would come to him. But how, and after what delay? There would be legal formalities and bother, and he hated both. That fool the doctor either could not or would not say how long the present state of things was likely to last. Yet, as he had said, it was wise to be ready for anything, for everything. Plainly, the best plan for him to adopt would be to induce his wife to make him a deed of gift of the three thousand pounds. That would diminish trouble in case of her death. There was no need of cruelty in

asking her to do this. The only thing absolutely necessary was success. He need not even hint to her that he was taking the precaution because of the fragility of her life. He could manage to make the deed of gift seem desirable because of some other reason. One should seldom tell men the truth, and women never. The truth was too strong for women. Their delicate natures were not constructed to bear it with advantage to themselves, and if you told the truth to men they were likely to use it to their own advantage. Quite right: truth was a jewel, but, like any other jewel, it was fit only for holiday wear.

As soon as he got that deed of gift executed there would not be much more for him to do at Singleton Terrace. Viewed as a place of mere free board and lodgings, it was not of much consequence. With

three thousand pounds and his present turn of luck he should be well off. Viewed as the home of a confirmed invalid who doted on him, Singleton Terrace was distasteful.

There would not be the least necessity for brutality or unkindness. Unkindness and brutality were always cardinal mistakes. He believed he could manage the whole matter with his wife, and appear in it greatly to his own advantage. He'd try that very day to arrange matters, so that at any hour he could quit Richmond for ever. What a merciful deliverance that would be for him! During the past few months he had scarcely dared to call his soul his own. Yes, if that deed could be got ready and executed in twenty-four hours, there was no reason why he should not shake the dust of Richmond off his feet in twenty-five.

Whither should he go? Ultimately back

to the States, no doubt; but in the first instance to Welford. The latter place would be perfect only for two circumstances: first, that infernal Philip Ray visited Boland's Ait close by, and, second, Hetty—that charming Hetty—had a brother, a most forbidding and ruffianly looking man, who might make himself intensely disagreeable. But it would be delightful to be under the same roof with that beautiful girl and saying agreeable things to her when they met. In all his life he never saw any girl so lovely as Hetty; and then look at the luck she had brought him! He would try Welford for a week or two—try the effect of Hetty's luck by playing every night for a fortnight. If he had won a good sum at the end of his trial, he should then be certain it was owing to Hetty. It would be easy to avoid Ray. He was engaged

at his office until the afternoon. Every afternoon Crawford could leave Welford, go to the Counter Club, dine there, and not come back till morning. The affair was as simple as possible.

Then he thought of his escape from drowning and his meeting with Kate. But these were unpleasant memories, and he made it a rule never to cherish any reminiscences which could depress him, so he banished them from his mind and fell into a peaceful sleep.

It was late when he awoke. Some letters had come for him, and, after reading them, he went to his wife's room, and put them down impressively on a small table by the bedside. His inquiries were exhaustive, sympathetic, affectionate. He kissed her tenderly, and sat by her, holding her hand in his, and patting it. He said all the soothing words he could think of, and

assured her of his conviction that in a few days she would be as well as she had been when they were so happily married.

She smiled, and answered him in gentle words, and in her soft sweet voice. She thanked him for his encouraging sayings, but told him with a shake of her head that she felt certain she should never be better—that this was the beginning of the end.

“But, indeed, you must get well,” he said. “You must get well for my sake. Look, what glorious news I have had this morning! Here is a letter from my place in South America. It is, unfortunately, full of technicalities. Shall I read it to you? or tell you the substance of it?” He held up a bulky envelope, with several foreign stamps on it.

“O, tell me the substance, by all means! I am not clever like you over technicalities.”

“It is, in effect, that my manager there

has himself invented a machine quite capable of dealing with the fibre, and that we are now in a position to set about manufacturing."

"What splendid news, William!" she cried, with gentle enthusiasm, pressing the hand she still retained. "You did not expect anything of this kind?"

"No. But excellent as the news is, it has a drawback; and that drawback is one of the reasons why you must get well at once."

"Why, what has my recovery to do with the affair, and what is the drawback?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is we cannot get the machinery made without some money, and the little I have isn't nearly enough."

"But I have some. Take the savings. I have told you over and over again that they are yours. Would what I have be enough?"

“Well, with what I have and what I can raise I think it would ; but you must get well first. It is only sentiment, no doubt ; but I could not bear to take your money while you are not as well as you were a little while ago. The only interest or object I now have in this discovery is that you may share the great benefit of it with me.”

“Indeed, indeed, you must not think of me in this way. It is like your dear kind self to say what you have just said ; but it is not businesslike, and you must take the money. I am only sorry it is not ten times as much.”

“No, no ! Not, anyway, until you are as well as you were a couple of months ago, dear Nellie.”

“But you must. I will listen to no denial. Fancy, allowing my illness to stand in the way of your success !”

For a good while he resisted, but in the end she prevailed, and he reluctantly consented to accept the money, and settle about the transfer from her to him that very day.

Accordingly, he went to town after breakfast, armed with a letter from his wife to Mr. Brereton, Mrs. Crawford's lawyer.

He came back early in the afternoon somewhat disappointed : it would take a day to complete the business.

"After all," he thought, "I must not grumble about the delay. The direct transfer of the money will be better for me than the deed of gift. In the one case I shall have the money, in the other I should have only a document."

He had abstained from going to the Counter Club that day for two reasons : first, he did not wish to risk discovery of his taste for play while the three thousand pounds were hanging in the clouds ; and, second,

he wished to believe the luck born of his acquaintance with Hetty prevailed most on the days he saw her, and should, to operate daily, be daily renewed by sight of her.

“When all is settled I’ll write for Mrs. Farraday to come back and stay here. She promised she would in case of need. Then I’ll tell my wife that my personal presence is absolutely necessary in America, and I’ll say good-bye to her and go down to Welford. I must arrange with my wife that Blore, the former agent, is not set to work collecting for a month or six weeks, so that I may have time to get out of the country, or away from Welford at all events. I don’t think I shall require more than three weeks at Welford. I can get those gates put up and taken down again, and stay there on pretence of superintending the work.”

CHAPTER XI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE meeting between Philip Ray and his sister was full of pain and shame to him and the acutest agony to her. Few words were spoken. Bramwell was not in the room. He tarried behind on the pretence of mooring the stage, so that the two might not be restrained or embarrassed by any consideration of him. But the presence of the husband seemed to haunt the place, and was felt by both as a restraining influence.

“If he can forgive her and take her back, what have I to say in the affair?” asked Philip of himself.

“No matter how much he may re-
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proach me, I will not answer," thought the unhappy woman. "Anything Philip could say to me would not hurt me now."

So beyond a few formal words no speech was exchanged between the two, and shortly after Bramwell came back Philip went away.

"May I stay in this room? This is your room, I know," said Kate meekly, when they were alone. "I do not wish to intrude. I know you have writing to do, and that I may be in the way."

There was no tone of bitterness or complaint in her voice. She simply wanted to know what his wishes were.

"While you were out," he said, "I arranged the room I had intended to be a play-room for the boy as my own. Yours will be the one you used last night, and this will be common to all of us. I shall

shift my books into my own room and write there."

"And the boy?" said she, with a tremble in her hoarse, dull voice. "Which room will be the boy's?"

"Yours, of course."

She moved towards him as if to catch his hand in gratitude. He stood still, and made no responsive sign.

"When I came here two years ago," he said quietly, "I changed my name from Mellor to Bramwell. I shall retain the name of Bramwell, and you will take it."

He did not request her to do it or command her to do it. He told her she would do it.

"As no doubt you are aware, I am very badly off now compared with the time—compared with some years ago." He was going to say "compared with the time I married you," but he forbore out of mercy.

“I have little more than a hundred a year and this place rent-free ; it is my own, but I cannot let it. I hope soon to be able to add to my income. If my anticipations are realised I may double my income ; but at present I am very poor.”

“And I am bankrupt,” said she with passionate self-reproach, “in fortune, in appearance, and in reputation.”

He held up his hand in deprecation of her vehemence.

“Understand me clearly. Mrs. Bramwell may not have any money, and may not be as remarkable for beauty as some other women. But recollect, she has no reputation, good or bad. She did not exist until this present interview began. The past can be of no use to us. I shall never refer to it again ; you will never refer to it again. There may have been things in the life of Kate and Frank Mellor which each of them

contemplates with pain. No pain has come into the life of Francis Bramwell during the two years of his existence. No pain can have come into the life of Kate Bramwell during the few minutes she has existed. It will be wisest if we do not trouble ourselves with the miseries of the Mellors. Do you understand?" he asked in his deep, full, organ-toned voice.

"I think I do," she answered. "You mean that we are to forget the past."

"Wholly, and without exception."

"And you will forget that you ever cared for me?"

"Entirely."

His voice was full and firm, but when he had spoken the word his lip trembled and his eyelids drooped.

He was walking softly up and down the room. She was sitting by the table in the same place as she had sat last night. Her

arms hung down by her side, her head was bowed on her chest, her air one of infinite, incommunicable misery.

“And you will never say a kind word to me again?” she said, her voice choked and broken.

“I hope I shall never say any word to you that is unkind.”

“That is not what I mean. You will never change towards me from what you are now this minute? You will never say a loving word to me as you used—long ago?”

She raised her face and looked beseechingly at him as he passed her chair.

“I shall, I hope, be always as kind-minded to you as I am now.”

“And never any more?”

“I cannot be any more.”

“Is there—is there no hope?” She clasped her hands and looked up at him in wild appeal.

He shook his head. "I loved you once, but I cannot love you again."

"You say you forgive me. If you forgive me, why cannot you love me? for I love you now as I never loved any one before."

"Too late! Too late!"

"Is it because my good looks are gone? Why, O, why cannot you love me again, unless it is because my good looks are gone?"

"No; your good looks have no weight in the matter. I could not forgive you if I loved you in the old way."

"Then," she cried, rising and stretching forth her arms wildly towards him, "do not forgive me; revile me, abuse me, yes, beat me, but tell me you love me as you did long ago; for I love you now above anything and all things on earth. Yes, ten thousand times better than I love my child! I never knew you until now. I was too giddy and

vain and shallow to understand you. I have behaved to you worse than a murderess. But, Frank, I would die for you now!" She flung herself on her knees on the floor, and raised her clasped hands above her streaming face to him. "On my knees I ask you in the name of merciful Heaven to give me back your love, as I had it once! Give it to me for a little while, and then I shall be content to die. You are noble enough to forgive me and to take me back into your house. Take me back into your heart too. Raise me up and take me in your arms once, and then I will kill myself, if you wish it; I shall then die content. Refill my empty veins with words of love and I will trouble you no more. I have been walking blindfold in the desert all my life, and now that the bandages are taken off my eyes and I can see the promised land, am I to find I can

never enter it? I am only a weak, wicked woman. You have extended to me forgiveness that makes you a god. Have for me, a weak woman, the pity of a god."

"I am no longer a man," he said, leaning against the wall. "I am smoke, an abstraction, a thing, an idea, a code. You are my wife and I will not cast a stone at you. You are my wife, and you are entitled to the shelter of my roof and the protection of my name. I make you free of both. But when you ask for love such as once was yours, I fail to catch the meaning of your words. You are speaking a language the import of which is lost to me. It is not that I will not, but that I cannot, give you what you ask. There would have been no meaning in the love I offered you years ago if I could offer you love now. Get up. It was with a view to avoiding a scene I spoke."

"I will not get up until you tell me there is hope—that some day you may relent."

"There is no question of relenting. When you left me you destroyed in me the faculty of loving you. Now get up. We have had enough of this. We must have no more. I have been betrayed into saying things I determined not even to refer to. Get up, and, mind, no more of this." With strong, firm arms he raised her from her knees.

She stood for a moment, leaning one hand on the table to steady herself. Then in a low quavering whisper, she said, "Is there any, any hope?"

"There is none."

She raised herself, and moved with uncertain feet to the door. "It would have been better I went to the river last night."

CHAPTER XII.

TEA AT CRAWFORD'S HOUSE.

WHEN Philip Ray left Boland's Ait he crossed over to the tow-path, and not to Crawford's Quay. It was still too early to call at Layard's. There was nothing else for it but to kill time walking about. Under ordinary circumstances when greatly excited he went for a very long walk. If nothing else but the startling and confounding affairs at Boland's Ait had to be considered, he would have dashed off at the top of his speed and kept on straight until he had calmed himself or worn himself out. But there was Crawford's House to be thought of. That must not be left far behind. Even now when he intended circling it

he could not bear to think he was turning his face away from it, although he knew it was necessary to make a radius before he could begin his circle.

His mind was in a whirl, and he could see nothing clearly. The astounding return of his sister from the grave, and the still more astounding pardon extended to her by her husband, threw all his ideas into phantasmagoric confusion. Images leaped and bounded through his brain, and would not wait to be examined. Of only one thing was he certain : that Frank was the noblest man he had ever met. Although he repeated over and over to himself Bramwell's words about Kate, although over and over again he called up the vision of Kate in that room on the islet, he could not convince his reason that forgiveness had been extended to her. In his memory he saw the figures and heard the voices, and under-

stood the words spoken, but a dozen times he asked himself, could it be true? or had his imagination played him false?

The affairs at the Ait dwarfed his own concerns, and made them seem tame and commonplace. That a young man should fall desperately in love with a beautiful girl like Hetty was the most natural thing in the world; but that a hermit, a young man of scrupulous honour like Frank, should take back an errant wife, whose former beauty had now turned almost to repulsiveness, transcended belief. It was true, but it was incredible.

As time went on, and the walking allayed the tumult in his mind, his thoughts came to his own position in the circumstances. He had not told Layard or Hetty any of Frank's history beyond the fact that it was a painful one, and a subject to be avoided. He had not told them that he was Bram-

well's brother-in-law. He had never said a word about Bramwell's wife.

Now all would have to be explained. Of course, he had intended telling when he spoke to Layard about Hetty; things had changed beyond anticipation, beyond belief, since last night. Had he known what was going to happen on the Ait last night, what had absolutely happened when Hetty and he landed there, he would not have said a word of love to the girl. He would have told her the facts about Kate before asking Hetty to marry Kate's brother, before asking Hetty to become the sister of this miserable woman.

He knew he was in no way responsible for his sister's sins, but some people considered a whole family tainted by such an act in one of its members. Some people believed conduct of this kind was a matter of heredity, and ran in the blood. Some

people would ask, If the sister did this, what could you expect from the brother?

Would the painful tale he had to tell Layard influence Hetty's brother against his suit? There were thousands of people who would consider that he himself was smirched by his sister's fault. Was Layard one of these?

The best thing for him to do was to relate the story at once; the most honourable and straightforward way for him to proceed would be to speak to Layard before he again saw Hetty. If Layard raised an objection, and that objection was insuperable, the most honourable course for him to pursue would be to give up all pretensions to Hetty.

Yes, but could he? And would he be justified in renouncing her now that he knew she loved him? It would be all very well if he had not made love to her and gone so

far as to ask her to marry him. If only his happiness were concerned the path of duty would be plain enough. But Hetty and he were now partners in love, and had he the power or the right to dissolve the partnership without consulting her? Clearly not. However he looked at the situation doubts and difficulties arose before his mind. There was only one matter clear—he ought to speak to Layard at once.

It was now half-past seven. Layard left the gasworks at eight. Why should he not intercept him on his way home and put him in possession of all the facts? Upon what Layard said, the course to be adopted could be based.

He got to the gas-house, and was walking up and down impatiently when Alfred Layard came out of the gateway and saw him.

“Anything the matter?” asked Layard

apprehensively when Ray came up to him.

“At your place? O, no! I wanted a few minutes’ talk with you, so I came to meet you.”

“All right,” said Layard, with a smile. He thought he could guess what the talk would prove to be about. He was the incarnation of unselfishness, and it never occurred to him for a moment to consider how awkward it would be for him if Hetty married and left him.

“I want first of all to tell you a very painful piece of family history,” said Ray, anxious to get the worst over as soon as possible.

“But why should you, Ray? I am the least curious man alive.”

“You will know why I wish to tell you before I have finished.”

Then, without further preface, he nar-

rated the history of Kate, her marriage, her flight, her supposed death, her appearance last night at the Ait, and her husband's forgiveness.

Layard was greatly interested and excited by the story. When it was finished, he said :

“There is enough Christianity in that man Bramwell to make a bishop.”

“To make the whole bench of bishops,” cried Ray enthusiastically. “I always knew he was a hero, but I was not prepared to find the spirit of a martyr as well. And yet I ought to have been prepared for anything noble and disinterested in him. He does what he believes to be right without any view to reward here or hereafter. He has had his wild days when he plunged, under his great trouble, into the excitement of gambling, but even in that he was unselfish ; he injured no one but himself.

Once he pulled up, he stopped for good and all. And now I come to the reason for taking you into confidence and telling you what you need never have known only for something which concerns myself more deeply than all else which has happened to me in my life."

Then in a few words he explained his position, his feelings towards Hetty, and his belief that his feelings were reciprocated.

"You have three matters to weigh," he said, in conclusion; "first, the family history I have told you; then my financial position, taking into account the chance of my getting the tuitions; and, last, whether you would object to me personally. In the short time I have known you, I have taken to you more than to any other man I ever met except Frank. I am speaking to you as much as a friend as Hetty's brother. If I did not look on you as a friend, I should

not care greatly to take you into my confidence and defer to you. But the notion of doing anything underhand or behind your back would seem to me intolerable treason."

"I'll be as straightforward with you as you have been with me. I have liked you from the first moment of our short acquaintance. The way in which you have spoken to me this evening strengthens ten thousand times my good opinion of you. The miserable family history you have told me has no bearing whatever on you, and I see nothing to stop you but the getting of those tuitions. Why, I married on little more than your salary; and during my short married life I never for one moment repented, nor did my poor girl. Contented and willing hearts are the riches of marriage, not money."

Ray was too much moved to say more

than "Thank you, Layard ;" but he stopped in his walk, and, with tears in his eyes, wrung the hands of the other man.

"And now," said Layard, as they resumed their way, "let us get home to tea."

That was his way of telling Ray that there was no need of further words either in explanation or of thanks.

"I thought we were going to have a thunderstorm last night, and to-night it looks like it too. I always feel a coming storm in the muscles of my arms, and they are tingling this evening."

Layard opened the door with his latch-key. The two men went into the front room, and in a few minutes Hetty appeared with the tea-pot. She coloured deeply on seeing Ray with her brother. She had not heard the footfalls of two people, and was not prepared to find him there. He had never before come in with Alfred, and a

suspicion of what had occurred flashed through her mind.

She did not speak to Ray. She felt confused, and half-pretended, even to herself, that she did not know he was present. Her brother went to her, and put his arm round her waist and kissed her cheek, and then drew her over to the chimney-piece, where Ray stood, feeling somewhat like a thief.

“You forgot to say good-evening to Ray,” said the brother.

“Good-evening,” said she, in a low voice, holding out her hand.

Ray took the long slender hand, feeling still more dishonest and shamefaced and miserable.

When the fingers of the lovers touched, Layard caught the joined hands in both his, and pressed them softly and silently together; then, turning away, he stepped

quickly to the window, and stood a long time looking at the dead wall opposite through misty eyes.

"I don't think we shall have that storm," said Ray at length.

Layard turned round. Hetty was pouring out the tea, and Ray was standing with his back to the chimney-piece.

"No," said Layard, "I fancy it is passing away. My arms feel easier."

Hetty was smiling, but looking pale.

"Do you take sugar and milk, Mr. Ray?" said she.

"Dear me, Hetty," said her brother, "what a lot you have to learn yet!"

She coloured violently, and shook her head at him.

"I wish you would sit down, Alfred. You are keeping all the light out of the room; I can't see what I'm doing."

"No," said he, looking meaningly from

her to Ray ; “ but, bad as the light is, I can see what you have done.”

At this Hetty and Ray laughed a suppressed laugh, and looked at one another with joyous glances.



CHAPTER XIII.

CRAWFORD WRITES HOME.

THE morning after Mrs. Crawford's relapse and Crawford's visit to town about the three thousand pounds, the husband was sitting by his wife's bedside. He was in a particularly cheerful and hopeful humour, and insisted that she had already begun to mend, and would in a week be better than she had been for months.

She shook her head with a sad smile, but said nothing. She did not wish to sadden the being she loved above all other living creatures by the thought of a final separation between them, a separation which she felt was inevitable, and to which she could not reconcile her mind. When

alone she would cry out in despair to her gentle heart, "To be so loved, and to be so loving, and to be separated so soon!"

He went on affecting undiminished confidence in her recovery. "I tell you, I am certain you must, you will, get well, and that much sooner than even the doctor thinks." (The doctor had told him again that day there was little hope of her rallying.) "What good would my luck be if you were not by my side to share it? My Nellie comforted and sustained me in my days of doubt and difficulty. Do you mean that she is not to share my triumph? I will take very good care she shall. And now I want to tell you what I insist upon doing. I will take no denial, for I look on it as essential to your recovery."

"I will do anything you tell me," she said with meek devotion. "I will do all I can to get well. For, William, I am the

happiest and most blessed woman in England, and I do not want to leave you, dear."

"That's my own brave wife," said he, winking his eyes quickly and patting her arm. "I don't think you will raise much, if any, objection to what I am about to do. I am going to write to Mrs. Farraday to come back and stay with you. She promised she would come if you needed her, and she will be a great source of comfort and confidence to you."

"But her brother?"

"Oh, her brother can do without her for awhile. You will be all right again in less than no time, and then, if she wishes, she can go back to her brother. And now I am off to write to Rochester for her by this very post, for a good thing cannot be done too soon, and I am sure this is a good thing for you."

He left her, went to his own room, wrote the letter, and posted it immediately himself. Then he came back to the house, and having entered the dining-room on the ground-floor, began walking up and down with brows lowered in deep meditation.

“I had better get it over me before Mrs. Farraday comes,” he thought as the result of his cogitations. “I can’t stay here any longer. I am not a sick-nurse to philander after an ailing woman, and dally in an invalid’s room. She was a fool to marry me. Did she think for a moment I fell a victim to her ancient charms? If she did she ought to be in a lunatic asylum. Of course I told her I wanted to marry her for love, but is there in the history of the whole human race a single case of a man saying to a woman, ‘I want to marry you for your money’? Not one.

“I can’t stand this house any longer :

it suffocates me. The doctor says there is no hope. Why should I wait to see the end? The approach of death and the presence of death are abhorrent to all healthy people. I can do no good by staying, and I have to think of myself. There are very few men living who would have been as good to her as I have been. She cannot expect me to do more, and," with one of his short laughs and a quick winking of his eyes, "my affairs in South America urgently demand my presence. I'll get the business over me at once. Brereton told me I could have the money early this afternoon."

Here his mind became so intensely occupied that his legs ceased to move, and he stood in the middle of the room lost in thought. He was contemplating scenes in his imagination : not proceeding by words. Presently words began to flow through his

brain again, and he resumed his pacing up and down.

“If there should be any hitch about that money I should be in a nice mess.” He shook his head gravely and repeated this contingency to himself two or three times. “That would never do. It would look weak and foolish. When I act I must act with firmness and decision. No, I had better make sure of the cash first.”

He put all the money he had in his pocket, left the house, and took the first train to town. At Waterloo he jumped into a hansom and drove straight to the office of Mrs. Crawford’s solicitor. He found Mr. Brereton in, and everything ready. The solicitor handed him an open cheque for £3,270, saying gravely as he did so:

“And you are fully resolved to put this money in that South American speculation?”

“My dear sir, there’s a vast fortune in that fibre of mine ; and now that the machinery has been perfected, it is only stretching out one’s hands to gather in hundreds of thousands of pounds.”

Brereton shook his head.

“The best place in which to put money is English Consols.”

“What, less than three per cent.! For you can’t buy even at par now. Why, my dear sir, it’s letting money rust.”

“It’s keeping money safe.”

Crawford shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace of dissatisfaction.

“Over-prudence, my dear Mr. Brereton. Who never ventured never got.”

“A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush ; and of all the uncertain things I know of there is only one worse than putting money in South American speculations, and that is putting it in Central American ones.”

“ Ah, but you have never been in South America!” said he triumphantly, and his eyes winked quickly, and he laughed a short unpleasant laugh, and thought to himself, “ Nor have I either.” Then he continued aloud, “ I am aware that it is most unwise of any one who does not know the ground to dabble in South American speculations, but, you see, I am well acquainted with the place, and know the ropes.”

“ The last client I had who touched anything in South America blew his brains out. But, of course, it is no affair of mine. I have only to do what I am asked by Mrs. Crawford in her letter to me. The cheque is an open one, as you requested. They will pay you across the counter. I hope you will not think of keeping such a sum as that in your house?”

“ O, dear, no! I am going to remit it at once to my agent. When you see me next,

Mr. Brereton," laughing and winking his eyes, "you will congratulate me upon my spirit and success."

"I hope so," said the lawyer drily, and in a tone and manner which plainly said he believed nothing of the kind would occur.

Crawford said good-bye and went straight to the bank, where he got thirty-two one-hundred pound notes and seventy in fives.

He had never had so much money in his possession before. He had never had any sum approaching it. Once or twice after a good racing week in the old times he had been master of five or six hundred, but three thousand two hundred pounds! It was almost incredible! And it was all in cash! It did not lie in the cold obstruction of any bank. It was not represented by doubtful I.O.U.'s. It was not represented by shadowy entries in a betting-book. It was not in-

vested in any shaky securities. It was not manifested by abstract entries in a ledger. The money was concrete and tangible, and lying safely in his breast-pocket under the stout cloth of his coat. He could take it out and count it now if he liked. That minute he could start for Monte Carlo or St. Petersburg, Australia or Norway.

As he walked along the streets he held his head high. He felt independent of all men, independent of fortune, of Fate. He had married for money, he had realised the prize, and it was now safe in his pocket. These notes were as much legally his own as his hands or his teeth. No one could take them from him except by force, and he took pride in thinking that few men who passed him in the street would be able to cope with him single-handed. He had as much thought of risking this money in anything so far off and tame as South American

speculations as he had of buying a box of matches and burning it note by note.

Of course, Brereton had been right in saying it would be a dangerous thing to keep such a tempting sum in an ordinary house. There might even be danger in walking about the streets with it in his pocket. Some dishonest person might have seen him draw it out of the bank and might be following him. He might be a match for more than an average man, but he would be no match for two or three. Garrotting had gone out of use, but it might be revived even in midday in London by men who knew the prize he carried, and were bold and prompt. If in a quiet street he were seized from behind and throttled so that he could not cry out, and if a man in front cut the pocket out of his coat, the thieves might be off before passers by knew what was going on or suspected any-

thing being wrong. He had a horror of revolvers, but plainly he ought to be armed. He did not yet know where he should keep his hoard, but in any case it would be well to possess the means of defending it.

Crawford had by this time got out of the City and was strolling through Regent Street. He turned into a gunsmith's shop and bought a short large-bore revolver and some cartridges. The man showed him how to load the weapon. Crawford explained that he was about to leave the country for Algiers, and wished to have all the chambers charged, as he was going in a vessel with a crew of many nationalities, and was taking out a lot of valuable jewellery.

Lying was a positive pleasure to him, even when it was not necessary. "It keeps a man's hand in," he explained the habit to himself.

It was now about two o'clock, and he began to feel the want of luncheon. There was no place where better food could be got or where the charges were more moderate than at the Counter Club. He was only a short distance from it. What could be more reasonable than that he should go and lunch there? Nothing. So he turned into an off street on the left, and in a few minutes was seated in a luxurious armchair in the dining-room, waiting for the meal he had ordered of the obsequious waiter.

He was somewhat tired by his walk, and found rest in the well-cushioned chair grateful and soothing.

Could anything be more comfortable and cheering than to sit at ease in this well-appointed club, with a small fortune in notes under one's coat? Here was no suggestion of illness or approaching death. All the men present were in excellent

health and spirits. They were talking of cheerful subjects—horses, theatres, cards, the gossip and scandal of the town. They spoke of nothing that was not a source of enjoyment; and though all they said ran on assumption that they did not contemplate the idea of any man denying himself pleasure or being unable to obtain pleasure owing to the want of money, they were not all rich men, but all spoke as if they were. It was so much pleasanter to sit here, listening to this talk and taking part in it, than to wander about that cold-mannered house in Singleton Terrace at Richmond, or to sit by the sick-bed of a wife ten years older than himself and whine out loving phrases and indulge in distasteful private theatricals.

Then the obsequious and silent-footed waiter brought in his cutlets, and whispered that his luncheon was ready. Everything

was very nice at Singleton Terrace, but somehow cutlets there and here were two widely different matters. It was no doubt easy to explain the reason of the difference. In one place the cook got twenty, in the other a hundred, pounds a year. But though that explained the difference, it made the cutlets at Singleton Terrace no better.

He had had enough of Richmond. Why should he go back there? As he had always held, there was no advantage in being brutal, and he would not undeceive his elderly wife. He would not tell her in plain words that he had never cared in the least for her, that he had married her merely for her money, and now that she was dying and her income would, for him, die with her, and that he had got all the money she had, that his whole mind was occupied with the image of a beautiful

young girl whom he was about to make love to and ask to fly with him on her (his wife's) money. No. It would be uselessly unkind to tell that middle-aged silly invalid any of these things. But why should he go back to Richmond?

If he went back to say good-bye he would have to play a long scene in private theatricals to which no salary was now attached, since he had all the savings in his pocket. Besides, he would find it hard, credulous as his elderly wife was, to make her believe there could be any urgent necessity for his immediate departure to South America. There would be a scene and tears—and he hated scenes and tears—and then if the surprise or shock made her worse, who could tell the consequences, the unpleasant consequences, which might arise?

In the next room were pen, ink, and paper. Why should he not write instead.

of going back? That was it! He'd write explaining, play at the club to-night, and go on to Welford in the morning. That was a better programme than crawling back to that silly old invalid and acting sorrow at parting when his heart was overrunning with joy.

He went into the next room and wrote his first letter to his wife. He used a sheet of unheaded paper, and did not date or domicile it.

MY DEAREST NELLIE,—Upon coming to town I found waiting for me a telegram from Rio Janeiro to the effect that if I did not reach that city at the very earliest moment possible—in fact, by a steamer sailing from London to-day—my title to the estate on which the fibre grows would lapse. Nothing but my personal presence could save it. So, much against my will, I

was obliged to drive in hot haste to the boat without the satisfaction of bidding you good-bye. Indeed, I have barely time to write this scrawl, and shall have to intrust it to a waterman for post. Be quite sure all will go well with me, and that I shall telegraph you the moment I land. I am so glad I wrote for Mrs. Farraday before leaving home this morning. I know she will take every care of my Nellie while I am away, and I am sure my Nellie will take every care of herself, and be quite well long before the return of her loving husband,

WILLIAM CRAWFORD.

“Thank heaven that’s the end of this ridiculous connection!” he said to himself as he dropped the letter into a pillar-box in front of the club. “My mind is now easy, and I can enjoy myself. I can play to-night as though I were still a bachelor with,

no thought of the morrow. Ah, but I have thought of the morrow! What delightful thought, too! delightful Hetty.”

It was late in the evening when this letter was delivered at Singleton Terrace. Nothing else came by that post. Although Mrs. Crawford had often seen her husband's writing, this was the first letter she had got from him, and she had never before seen her name and the address of that house in his writing. She did not recognise the hand, and thinking the letter must be connected with routine business about the Welford property, she put it on the table by her bedside unopened. He attended to all such matters.

When the maid brought in her supper she took up the letter again and turned it over idly in her hands. All at once it struck her that the writing was familiar, but whose it was she could not guess.

With a smile at her own curiosity, she broke the cover and drew out the sheet of paper.

She looked at the signature languidly until she read it. Then hastily, tremulously she scanned the first few lines. When she gathered their import she uttered a low wailing sob and fell back insensible on the pillow.



CHAPTER XIV.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD FREE.

WHEN William Crawford had posted his letter to his wife he felt ten years younger than an hour before. He enjoyed an extraordinary accession of spirits. The day had grown heavy and cloudy, but to him it was brighter than the flawless blue of Mediterranean summer. Richmond and Singleton Terrace were done with for good and all. There were to be no more private theatricals played for board and lodgings. Instead of simulating love for an elderly woman, he was at liberty to make real love to the most charming young girl he had ever met. His notions of right and wrong were clear and simple: what he

liked was right, what he did not like was wrong. Since he had come to man's estate he had acted upon the code, and it never once occurred to him to question it. He did not object to other men being pious or just or modest; he did not object to their even preaching a little to him about the merit of these or any other virtues. All he asked was to be let go his own gait unmolested.

He was now at liberty to take what path he chose and adopt what sport pleased his humour. He had played for a small fortune and won. He felt proud of his success, and sorry that the nature of it forbade him glorying in it. He was aware that the most disreputable and unprincipled blackleg in the Counter Club would scorn to get money as he had acquired his. But this did not matter to him. He was not going to tell any one at the club how he came by the

money ; that was an irksome self-restraint imposed upon himself out of deference to ridiculous conventional ideas. But he had the money in his pocket—that was the great thing.

As he intended playing all through the night, if the game were kept up, it was too early to begin at three o'clock in the afternoon. He should be fagged out before morning if he sat down now. He was neither so young nor so impetuous that he could not discipline desire to delay.

All at once he remembered that in abandoning Singleton Terrace so suddenly he had lost his kit. The value of his baggage was not very great, and with the sum now in his possession he would not for three times its value go back to Richmond for it. He had now no personal belongings but the clothes he stood in and a portmanteau at

Welford. He would go to a tailor and an outfitter and order what he wanted. That would amuse him and help to kill time. He should get back to the club about seven, and devote the rest of the evening and all the night to cards.

He did not go to the tailor with whom he had dealt since he came to live at Richmond. He wanted to cut himself off from that place as completely as possible.

At the tailor's he ordered three suits of clothes to be ready in three days and forwarded to Crawford's House, Crawford Street, Welford. What he bought at the outfitter's were to be sent to the tailor's and to accompany the parcel of the latter. He paid in advance for all. Then he went to another shop, purchased a portmanteau, and directed it to be delivered at the tailor's, and sent a note with it, asking him to put the outfitter's parcel and the

clothes into it and send it to the address already given.

Then he bethought him of a dressing-bag, and he bought a handsome one with silver-mounted bottle and ivory-backed brushes. The bag, being of leather, reminded him that he had no boots but those on his feet. So he purchased a couple of pairs and a pair of slippers, and the slippers put him in mind of a dressing-gown.

He directed all these things to be sent to the tailor's, and wrote to the tailor to let them all be forwarded at the one time—that is, when the clothes were finished, in three days.

He enjoyed this shopping greatly. He had never before spent so much money on himself in one day. It was so pleasant to buy these articles without worrying about the price, to be in doubt as to whether he should have a dressing-bag at

thirty or thirty-five pounds, and to decide in favour of the thirty-five-pound one merely because it had prettier bottles and a greater number of pockets.

When he could think of nothing else which he wanted, he said to himself, "And now what shall I take Hetty? I must get the very handsomest present I can light upon."

This set him off calling Hetty up to mind. He looked into the windows of a dozen jewellers' and shops where fancy articles were sold. He failed to find an article to his liking. He could not realise Hetty accepting any of the costly gifts presented to his view. At length with a sudden start he cried out to himself, "What an idiot I have been! Of course, she would not accept any of these things from me now. A few simple flowers from Covent Garden to-morrow morning on

my way to Welford will be the very thing."

It never once occurred to him during the day that the money he was spending belonged to his wife, and was being laid out in a way and under conditions not contemplated by her in giving it to him. When he decided on taking flowers to Hetty, it never once occurred to him that this would be spending his wife's money to conciliate a rival of hers, and that twenty-four hours ago he would have bought these same flowers for his deserted wife.

"Hetty," he said, formulating his theory, "is to be won through her imagination, not by pelf."

When he got back to the club he reckoned up what he had spent. It was an agreeable surprise to find that although he had treated himself with great liberality,

all his purchases did not absorb the hundred-pound note he had changed at the tailor's. He had got a moderate outfit and a very handsome dressing-case, with cut-glass bottles silver-mounted, and ivory-backed brushes, for less than one thirty-second part of the money received from Mr. Brereton that afternoon. He sat down to an excellent dinner with the conviction that he had done a fair day's work, and that he was entitled to enjoy himself for the remainder of the evening, and as far into the morning as he chose.

The dinner was excellent ; his shopping had given him zest for it, and when he stood up from the table he felt in the most excellent humour with himself and all the world.

He looked at his watch.

"She has my letter by this time," he said to himself, thinking of his wife. "If she is

not a greater fool than I take her for, she will know from it that she has seen the last of me."

When he wrote the letter he had no intention of conveying any such idea to her, but his shopping and thoughts of Hetty had hardened his heart since then towards his unhappy wife, and now he wanted to believe that his letter would leave her no loophole of hope.

"Dr. Loftus said any shock might bring on the end. Perhaps my letter——" He paused and did not finish the sentence, but began another: "When a case is hopeless the greatest mercy which can be shown to the sufferer is, of course, to put an end to the struggle. She could not have fancied for a moment that I was going to spend all my life in the sick-room of a woman almost old enough to be my mother. Anyway, I need not bother my head any more about

the matter. She cannot say that while our married life lasted I was not a kind and considerate husband. Turn about is fair play, and I am going to be a little kind and considerate to myself now. I'll put the past away from my mind. 'Gather we rosebuds while we may' is my version. Now to lose for the last time."

At the Counter Club there were men every night who did not mind how far into the morning they sat so long as they were winning. From the moment Crawford touched the cards until he rose at half-past six he had lost steadily. Though he had played for higher stakes than usual, he had been as careful of his game as if he had no more than a few hundred pounds with him. He had not been reckless. He had not plunged. Luck had simply been dead against him, and when, while eating his early breakfast, he counted up the cost,

he found he was close on three hundred pounds the worse for his night's experience.

Mentally he cursed his bad luck.

"But I deserve no better," he thought. "I told myself that I should have good luck only when I had come from Welford. The luck I played with last night was my wife's or my own, and both have been invariably bad. I shall go to Welford to-day, and play to-night with Hetty's luck, and win back all I have lost and more besides. And now to get a bouquet for Hetty—for the loveliest girl in the whole of England. But the bouquet must not be too splendid. It must be simple and cheap, or it might do more harm than good."

At Covent Garden he bought some simple blossoms, and had them tied carelessly together.

“She will not value them for what they cost, but for my remembering her.”

He was full of confidence in his power to fascinate and win. It never for a moment occurred to him that Hetty might not care for him or his memory of her. The notion of a rival had never entered his head, and if any one had suggested such a thing he would have laughed the consideration of it to scorn. He admired Hetty intensely, and he meant to succeed, and succeed he would.

He lounged about Covent Garden for a good while, for he did not want to reach Welford until Layard had gone to the gas-works. Of course he should say his visit to Crawford's House was made with the purpose of seeing what progress had been made with the gates for the flooded ice-house.

It was about eleven o'clock when he got to Welford Bridge.

“The coast will be quite clear till one or two o’clock,” he thought, with a sense of satisfaction. “Layard has gone to the works and Philip Ray is in his office, curse him!”

When Hetty heard the latch in the door that day she came to no hasty conclusion that it was her brother come back for something he had forgotten. She was in the kitchen with Mrs. Grainger at the moment, and guessed immediately it was Crawford, although the week was not yet up. If Philip Ray had not spoken out to her, that sound at the door and the likelihood of the visitor being the landlord of the house would have thrown her into unpleasant excitement bordering on panic; but now she felt as calm and as much at ease as though certain it was Alfred himself.

“I shall say nothing of what that

dreadful man said about his falling into the river," she resolved hastily. "If he chooses to speak of it, well and good; if he does not, well and good also. We are to leave this house as soon as Alfred can make arrangements for doing so. The quieter and the smoother everything goes in the meantime the better."

Crawford paused in the hall. Mrs. Grainger appeared. "Is Mr. Layard in?" he asked, well-knowing he was not.

"No, sir, he's gone to the works."

"Then will you tell Miss Layard I should be glad to see her for a few minutes?" he said, taking off his hat and putting it on the table.

Hetty came at once, and held out her hand with a smile.

"She looks lovelier than ever," he thought, as he took the long slender hand and retained it. "I know I have come

before my time, but I have been bothered again in my sleep about that ice-house and you. I will stay a day or so in order to see the gates put up—that is, of course, if you do not object?”

“Object!” she said, withdrawing her hand. “Why on earth should we object?”

“Well, I don’t know,” said he. “It may seem to you that I am unduly anxious about the matter. But, upon my word, my anxiety about you has deprived me of all peace since I saw you last, and that scoundrel to whom I gave the order for the gates has not begun them yet. I assure you I had to exercise all my self-restraint to keep my hands off the fellow when I forced the truth from him. Will you accept a few simple flowers as a peace-offering and in lieu of the gates?”

“O, thank you,” she said. “They are beautiful! But you give yourself a great

deal of unnecessary anxiety and trouble about that ice-house. We never allow little Freddie on the Quay by himself, and of course there is no danger for a grown-up person, because no grown-up person ever goes near it. How on earth," she asked, with a laugh, "do you fancy a grown-up person could fall into such a place?" She wondered was he going up to his own room, or did he intend to remain standing there all day?

"I daresay I should not mind it if my dream happened to be about any one else. But the mere hint that any danger could threaten you is enough to drive me distracted. It is indeed," he said, looking at her intently, and with a pained expression on his usually passive face. "I assure you I did not sleep a wink last night; I could not, and I feel quite worn out and ill this morning. I have been wandering about,

trying to kill time until I thought it was not too early to call here. I am hardly able to stand with anxiety, want of sleep, and fatigue."

"Would you not like to go to your own room and rest awhile? I will send Mrs. Grainger up with something nice for you."

"Mrs. Grainger could bring up nothing that I'd care for, and I hate the notion of going to that lonely room. I am quite nervous and unstrung." He sighed faintly and leaned against the wall for support.

"Well," she said, "will you come into our room and rest there?" Plainly, after his reference to the loneliness of his own place and the declaration of his exhausted condition, there was nothing but to offer him their front-room.

"Thank you," he said, "I shall very gladly accept your offer. I am thoroughly ashamed of seeming so weak and unmanned,

but indeed I have had an awful time of it."

He sank on a chair as though completely exhausted. She stood by the door and said, "Cannot I send you something, Mr. Crawford?"

"If you would be so good as to get me a glass of water and then not leave me for a little while I should feel very grateful to you."

She hastened away and returned in a few seconds with the water.

"Miss Layard, I cannot tell you how ill I felt as I came along here. I really thought I should not have had courage to open the front door. I was full of the direst imaginings. I fancied that no sooner should I raise the latch than some awful form of bad news about you would strike me dumb with horror, paralyse me with despair." He took out his handkerchief

and rubbed his forehead, which, however, was perfectly free from moisture.

“I am very sorry to be the cause of so much trouble to you, Mr. Crawford,” said Hetty with some concern, though she had a vague kind of feeling that there was something wrong with the man—that he was either acting or of weak intellect. It never once occurred to her that he was thinking of making love to her. How could it? Was not he a married man? And did he not know that they were aware the owner of the Welford and Leeham property was his wife? She thought he had been a good deal too impulsive and a little impertinent on the former occasion when he told her of his dream, but now she was almost convinced that his violence of language on the former occasion and his physical collapse now were the result of a weak mind under strong excitement.

For a while after drinking the water he sat still and did not speak. Apparently he was gradually recovering, for he sighed once or twice, and once or twice straightened himself and sat upright on his chair. "I shall be all right in a few minutes. The sight of you is doing me good."

"Well, of course you know now nothing dreadful has happened?"

"To you—yes; I know that, thank Heaven! but to me, yes."

"Something dreadful has happened to you?" cried Hetty. "I am sorry to hear you say so. Nothing, I hope, that can't be mended?"

"Well, I do not know about that. If my condition were very desperate, Miss Layard, and it was in your power to mend it, and I asked you to help me, would you do so?"

“Certainly, Mr. Crawford, if I possibly could.”

He rose and went to her where she sat by the table, and bent over her, and said in a low, tremulous, tender voice, “Thank you—thank you a thousand times, my dear Miss Layard, my dear Hetty—may I call you Hetty?”

She coloured and looked uncomfortable, and this made her shine in his eyes with ineffable beauty. “It is not usual,” she said at last.

“No, it is not usual, but I would deem it a great privilege. I of course would not call you by your dear Christian name when any one was by, but when you and I were having a little chat by ourselves I might, might I?”

Her colour and her confusion increased. “It is not usual,” she repeated. “There is no reason why you should call me one thing

now and another thing at another time." She raised her eyes, drew away a little from him, and pointing to the chair, said with steady emphasis which surprised herself, and showed him he must go no further—now, anyway: "I am afraid you are not yet rested enough to stand so long. Will you not sit down again?"

"You are right," he said with a deep sigh. "You are quite right. I am completely worn out, and my head is confused."

"There is no couch in your own room—perhaps you would like to rest on the one here? You will not be disturbed for some hours yet. My brother does not come in till three."

"Thank you very much, Miss Layard," he said, without any emphasis on her name. "But I think I'll go to my own room and lie down now. If I could get an hour's sleep I should be all right."

When he stood alone in his own room he said to himself, "I have not made much progress with her yet. I durst not go any further to-day than I went. Next time I ask her I'd bet a thousand pounds to a penny she'll give me leave to call her Hetty when we're alone. Once let her give me leave to call her Hetty when we are alone while I am to call her Miss Layard when any one else is present, and the rest is simple. My dreams"—he uttered his short sharp laugh and winked his eyes rapidly—"my dreams and my enormous solicitude for her welfare *must* tell in the end."

He went to the open window and looked out at the canal and the Ait and the tow-path. Then he turned his eyes downward.

With a cry of terror he sprang back, as though a deadly weapon or venomous snake in act to strike were a hand's breadth from his breast.

CHAPTER XV.

CRAWFORD IS SLEEPLESS.

WHAT startled Crawford and made him draw back in terror from the window was the sight beneath him of the stage reaching from Boland's Ait to Crawford's Quay across the murky waters of Crawford's Bay.

Involuntarily he put his hand behind and felt for the revolver in his pocket. It was reassuring to find it safe and within easy reach.

It had been bad enough to know that Philip Ray visited the idiotic recluse, Bramwell, on this accursed island; but to find a means of communication established between the Ait and the Quay was alarming in the extreme.

What could be the object of this floating bridge? Of course it was not there merely by accident. It was there with the consent of the Layards and the poor drivelling creature who lived on the holm.

William Crawford was not an intrepid man. Layard was near the truth when he called him a coward. Crawford never courted danger. His instinct was to flee from it. If he could not run away, he preferred thrusting his head into the sand to looking menace straight in the face. If a person or a place became obnoxious to him he simply went away or stayed away.

In the present case the thing he would like best was that Philip Ray might die, or be killed, or stop away from Boland's Ait because of some sufficient and final reason, death being the most satisfactory of all. After the cessation of Ray's visits to the Ait for fully sufficient reason, what he would

have liked was his own absence from the neighbourhood. The latter means of terminating the difficulty lay in his own hands, but two considerations operated against his adopting it. In the first place, he could use the precaution of not being in the house, or even district, during the hours when Ray was likely to be free from his office; and, in the second place, he could not bring himself to abandon his pursuit of Hetty. He was willing to run a moderate risk for her sake.

“I think,” he had said to himself that day on his way to Welford, “that if Nellie were to die, and I found Hetty continued to bring me luck, I should marry her.”

He had never asked himself whether it was likely Hetty would marry him or not. He always considered that women should be allowed little or no voice in such matters.

From the shock of seeing the stage connecting the Ait and the Quay he recovered quickly. He went back to the window and looked out again.

There was not a cloud in the heavens. The noonday sun of mid-June blazed in the sky. There was no beauty in the scene, but it was looking its best and brightest. Under the broad intense light of day the waters of the Bay and the Canal shone like burnished silver, all their turbidity hidden from sight by the glare, as the darkness in the heart of steel is masked by the polished surface. Now and then a stray wayfarer passed along the tow-path. A barge, piled up high with yellow deals, trailed with slackened rope after the leisurely horse. The grass on the slope up from the tow-path was still green and fresh with the rains of recent spring. Beyond the wall at the top of the bank burned a huge vermillion

show-van with golden letters flaming in the light. The tiles of Bramwell's cottage glowed a deep red under the blue sky. Afar off factory chimneys, like prodigious columns of some gigantic ruined fane, stood up against the transparent air with diaphanous capitals of blue smoke uniting them to the blue vault above. From Welford Bridge came the dull sound of heavy traffic, and faintly caught from some deep distance came the faint flapping beat of heavy hammers driving metal bolts through the stubborn oak of lusty ships. Sparrows skipped on the ground and twittered in the air. High up in the blue measures of the sky a solitary crow sailed silently by unheeding. All the world appeared dwelling in an eternal calm of vital air and wholesome light. All abroad seemed at peace under the spell of a Sabbath sky.

Suddenly he became conscious of voices

near and beneath him. He looked out, but could see no one.

"They seem to come from the island," he thought, "and to be children's voices."

"It's a 'bus," said one of the young voices, "and I'm the driver."

"No," said another young voice, but a more resonant one than the former; "it's a tramcar, and I'm the driver."

"And I'm the conductor."

"No; I'm the conductor too."

"And what am I?"

"O, you're the people in the car. Fares, please. Here, give me this piece of slate. That's your fare. O, I say, there's a coal wagon on the line before us!"

The other boy uttered a shrill cry.

"What's that?"

"The whistle for the coal-van to get out of the way."

"But I am the driver, and you are not to whistle."

"Then I am the conductor, and the conductor rings the bell."

"No, you're not. I am the driver and the conductor, and you are the people in the tramcar, and all you have to do is to sit still and pay your fare. Fares, please."

"I am not to pay my fare twice. I don't like to be the people."

"O, but you are to pay your fare again, for we are coming back now, and you are different people."

"I don't like this game. Let us play something else."

"Very well. We'll play it's a boat, and that you fall into the river, and I catch you and pull you out, and ——"

"Curse the brats, whoever they are!" cried Crawford fiercely, as he put his hand

on the sash and drove the window down violently.

Freddie's words were purely accidental. For neither he nor any one else had heard from Hetty about Crawford's accident at the Mercantile Pier. She had said no more to her brother than that the landlord had come about the gates for the ice-house, and the subsequent alarming attempt at extortion by Red Jim had driven curiosity regarding Crawford's visit out of Layard's mind. Now that the latter had made up his mind to get out of this house as soon as possible, he cared little or nothing about the doings of the owner, so long as the owner kept his eccentricities within reasonable limits. The talk which Layard had with Bramwell on the subject of leaving Crawford's house had made no lasting impression on the brother. When he was by himself that night he made up his

mind finally on two points. First, he would have Mrs. Grainger all day in the house; and, second, he would find a new home as soon as he could get rid of the present one.

The words of the child playing in the old timber-yard of the Ait had an unpleasant effect on Crawford. He did not know who the child was, nor could he bring himself to believe that his mishap at the Mercantile Pier had anything to do with the words overheard, and yet the coincidence vexed him. He told himself it was ridiculous to allow the circumstance to disturb him, but he could not help himself.

"I begin to think," he muttered, "that sitting up does not agree with me. I must be growing nervous. I ought to have some sleep if I am to try my luck again to-night—my luck and Hetty's," he added. "But if I sleep I must take care not to

overdo it. I don't want to be here when that bearded ape of a brother of hers comes in to dinner." He went to the head of the stairs and called out to Mrs. Grainger to knock at his door and tell him when it was half-past two. Then he took off his coat, waistcoat, and boots, and lay down on his bed.

It was not quite as easy to go to sleep as he imagined it would be. The words of the child kept ringing in his ears. If by any chance the story of his fall into the water reached Hetty's ears, it would not improve his position in her mind. It might, in fact, cover him with ridicule. The bare thought of being laughed at made him writhe and curse and swear.

Well, if he wanted to get any sleep, he must put this nonsensical trouble out of his head. He ought to be very sleepy, and yet he felt strangely wakeful.

Then he could not say seriously to himself that he had made much progress with Hetty. Had he made any? He did not, of course, expect to find her in love with him all at once, but he had hoped she would show a little interest in him. If he must tell himself the truth, the only interest she showed in him was a desire to get him away from herself or to get away from him. In a week or so that would be all changed, but it was not pleasant just now.

“Confound it!” he muttered, turning over on his other side, “if I keep going on this way I shall not get a wink of sleep.”

There was no more virtue in lying on one side than the other. He successfully banished from his mind any reflections that might disturb him. He thought of all the pleasant features of his present condition. He had for ever cut himself adrift from Singleton Terrace and the slavery to that

infatuated old fool, his wife. He had now in his pocket, even after his losses of last night, four times more money than ever he had owned at one time in all his life before, and he had a weapon to defend himself and his money. He had never possessed a revolver or a pistol of any other kind until now. He was absolutely secure against all danger. No harm could come to him or his money. He was afraid of nothing in the world now, of no one——Curse that Philip Ray!

But he must remember that Philip Ray could have nothing more than a revolver, and that he himself had one, and at close quarters such a weapon was as effective in the hands of a man unaccustomed to its use as in those of one who had practised shooting hours a day for years.

No; sleep would not come. Perhaps if he put the revolver under his head the sense

of security its presence afforded would soothe him into slumber.

He got up and took the weapon out of the back pocket of his coat. He poised it in his hand, and looked at it with mingled feelings of timidity and admiration. He cocked it, and took aim at spots on the wall paper a few inches above the level of his own eye. "If Ray were there now, and I pulled this trigger, he would be a dead man in less than a minute. I do not want to kill him. I should not fire except in self-defence. But if I thought he meant any harm, I'd save my life and put an end to his—the murderous-minded scoundrel!"

With the utmost care he lowered the hammer and, thrusting the revolver under his pillow, lay down again.

No; he did not feel any inclination to sleep. He counted a thousand; he watched a large flock of sheep go one by one through

a gap ; he repeated all the poetry he knew by rote, and found himself as wakeful as ever.

He tumbled and tossed about, and poured out maledictions on his miserable condition. He had not had experience of such a state before. Until to-day he had possessed the power of going to sleep at will. He had never lain awake an hour in his life. This was most tantalising, most exasperating. He should not be fresh for the cards to-night. He should be heavy and drowsy when he wanted to be clear and bright. How could he be fresh enough to play if he did not get rest ?

Could it be the burden of this money was too great for him ? Was he really apprehensive of being robbed ? Brereton had told him it was dangerous to carry so large an amount in cash about with him. Had Brereton's words sunken into his mind,

and were they now working on him un-awares? No one could gainsay the wisdom of Brereton's caution. It was a dangerous thing to go about the streets of London with three thousand pounds in one's pocket. But there was nothing else for it. He would not put the money in an English bank, for he could not get an introduction without betraying himself, his presence in London, and telling more of his affairs than he desired. Lodging it in the Richmond bank was quite out of the question.

It was maddening to feel he could not sleep. Could it really be he was, unknown to himself, in dread of being plundered if he lost consciousness?

He opened his eyes and looked around him. Then, with an angry exclamation, he sprang up.

"What an idiot I have been," he cried, "to leave the door unlocked! My reason

must be going when I could be guilty of such folly."

He turned the key in the lock. He looked around the room. He had shut the window to keep out the voices of the children, but he had omitted to fasten it down. He hasped it now. Then he went to the chair on which his coat lay, took the bundle of notes out of his breast-pocket, and thrust it under the pillow of the bed beside the revolver. He looked at his watch. "One o'clock," he muttered. "Now for an hour and a half's sleep. I shall wake fresh, and then be off to town."

Now and then he thought his desire was about to be realised. Now and then for a moment a confusion arose in his senses, and he lost the sharp outlines of reality, only to return to intense wakefulness and renewed despair.

"I shall go mad!" he cried in his heart.

“Something tells me I shall go mad. Between Ray, and the Club, and Singleton Terrace, and Hetty, and the money, and this want of sleep, I know I shall go mad. Insomnia is one of the surest signs of coming insanity. O, it would be cruel—cruel if anything happened to me now that I have just won all! I am free of Nellie; I have the money; I have felt the influence of Hetty’s luck, and will feel it again to-night. If Hetty would only come with me I should be out of the way of Kate’s brother. Curse him a thousand times! And now I feel my head is going, my brain is turning. It isn’t fair or just after all the trouble I have taken. It is horrible to think of losing everything now that I have so much within my grasp. I think that fall into the river and the meeting with Kate afterwards must have hurt my brain. And this sleeplessness, this

wearing sleeplessness, will finish the work !
O, it is too bad, too cruel ! It is not fair !”

With a cry of despair he rose and began pacing up and down the room, frantically waving his hands over his head, and moaning in his misery.

Mrs. Grainger knocked at the door.

“It’s half-past two, sir.”

“All right.”

The voice of the woman acted like a charm.

“What on earth,” he asked himself, pausing in his walk, “have I been fooling about? I daresay that ducking and the fright of it, and the meeting with Kate, and the long repression at Singleton Terrace, and the cards, and finding myself so near Ray, and this bridge from the island to the Quay, and having the anxiety of the money on my mind, have all helped to put me a little out of sorts, and therefore, like the

fool that I am, I must think I am going mad. The only sign of madness there is about me is that I should fancy such a thing. Why, the mere lying down has made me all right. I feel quite refreshed and young again. And now I must off. I don't want to meet that grinning bearded oaf."

Crawford put on his coat, waistcoat, and boots, replaced the money and the revolver in his pockets, and went downstairs. He could see Hetty through the open door of the sitting-room, arranging the table for dinner.

"I perceive," he called out to her in a blithe voice, "that you have opened up communications with your Robinson Crusoe. You have got a plank, or a stage, or something, from the Quay to the Ait."

"O," said Hetty, "Robinson Crusoe has a little boy the same age as our Freddie,

and Freddie goes over every day to play with young Crusoe, and that's why the stage is there."

"I heard children's voices from my room. I suppose they belonged to Freddie and his young friend?"

"Yes. You couldn't be within a mile of the place without hearing Freddie's voice."

"Good-day."

"Good-day." Crawford went to the door and opened it. Suddenly a thought struck him, and he closed the door and ran upstairs. When he found himself in his own room he shut the door, and said to himself in a tone of reproach, "How stupid of me not to think of that before. Why need I carry all this money about with me when I can leave the bulk of it here?"

He counted out twenty-five one hundred-pound notes and locked them in a drawer.

He turned the key in the lock of the door on the outside, and dropped it into his pocket. Then he slipped down the stairs noiselessly and gained the street without seeing either Hetty or Mrs. Grainger.

“I feel a new man now,” he said to himself. “There is about as much chance of my going mad as of my being made Archbishop of Canterbury. And now we shall see if there is anything in my notion about Hetty’s luck. To-night will be the test.”



CHAPTER XVI.

CRAWFORD SLEEPS.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD was in a hurry away from Welford, not in a hurry to the Counter Club. His design was more to escape a meeting with Layard, than to pick up any of his gambling associates. "A walk," he thought, "will do me good." So, instead of taking the steamboat or any wheeled conveyance, he crossed Welford Bridge at a quick pace and kept on, heading west.

He felt that this day made an epoch in his life. He had bidden good-bye to his wife for ever. He had realised the fortune for which he had schemed. He had put himself under the tutelage of Hetty's luck. He would shortly cut the past adrift. If

Nellie died soon—a thing almost certain—he would marry Hetty, leave the country and settle down. Of course, whether his wife died or not, Hetty must be his. That was settled, both because he admired her more than any other woman he had ever met and because she had brought him luck, and would bring him more. He knew, he felt as sure he should win that night as he did that the sun was shining above him. If he did not win that night he should be more astonished than if the sky now grew dark and night came on before sunset. O, how delightful and fresh would life be in the new world with Hetty and good luck present, and all the dangers and troubles and annoyances of the old world left behind here, and banished from his mind for ever!

He had not felt so light and buoyant for many a long day. What an absurd creature he had been half-an-hour ago, with

his fears of going mad just because he had been a little upset and deprived of sleep for twenty-four hours!

He crossed the river by London Bridge and loitered about the City for a couple of hours. He felt that sensation of drowsiness coming on him again. He knew he could sleep no more now than when at Welford. Again his mind became troubled, and, shaking himself up, he exclaimed, "I will not suffer this again. There is nothing to rouse one up like the cards. Now to test my theory of Hetty's luck." He hailed a hansom and drove to the Counter Club.

The dinner at the club was excellent, but he had little or no appetite. As a rule he drank nothing but water. This evening he felt so dull and out of sorts he had a pint of champagne. It roused and cheered him at first, and after a cup of coffee he felt much better than he had all day. Not

giving himself time to fall back into his former dull and depressed condition, he went straight to the card-room, where he found more men than usual, and the play already running high.

That night remains immemorable in the annals of the Counter Club. Play had been going on from early in the afternoon. Three brothers named Staples, members of the club, had lately come into equal shares of a large fortune left by a penurious old uncle. This was the first evening they had been at the Counter since they had got their legacies, and they had agreed among themselves to make a sensation. Up to this night they had been obliged to shirk high play, as their means were very limited and no credit was given at the card-tables. They were flush now, and had made up their minds to play as long as they could find any one to sit opposite them. When

they came into the card-room an hour before Crawford they told a few friends their intention. The news spread, and the room filled to see the sport. Owing to the high stakes there were fewer players and a much greater number of spectators than usual.

“Now,” thought Crawford, when he had heard the news, “this will be a good test. I am in no hurry, and I will give my luck, Hetty’s luck, a fair trial. I have about five hundred pounds, and I’ll play as long as they play if my money holds out.”

There were six tables in the room, and at each of three one of the brothers sat. Crawford took his place at the table where the eldest was playing.

At midnight Crawford was ten pounds better off than at the beginning. This was worse than to have lost fifty. It was stupefying. It was more like earning money at

a small rate an hour than winning money at cards.

As the men at Crawford's table had resolved to make a night of it, they adjourned for half-an-hour at one o'clock for supper. Crawford was still further disgusted to find that now he had eight pounds more than at starting. Eight pounds after five hours! Why, verily, the game did not pay for the candle. And worse than the paltriness of his winnings was this feeling of drowsiness which had come on him again. He now blamed the champagne for it. He drank water this time.

At half-past one play was resumed. The dull heavy feeling continued, and at times Crawford hardly knew what he was doing. The night flew by. By four o'clock all the lookers-on had left, and the room contained only players. All the tables but one were now deserted. At this one six men sat,

Crawford, the three Staples, and two other members of the club.

By some extraordinary combination of luck no money worth speaking of had changed hands. All the players declared they had never seen anything so level in their lives. At this time there was a pause in the play for light refreshment. Five of the men had brandies and sodas, Crawford had coffee. He looked at the counters before him, and counted them with his eye. He had been making money at something like the rate of a day labourer. He had won two or three sovereigns! This wasn't play, but slavery.

The other men had nothing sensational to say; they all declared they were pretty much as they had started. No one had gained much, and no one was much hurt.

"Never saw such a thing in my life!" said the eldest Staples in amazement.

“Nor I,” said Crawford.

“Shall we say seven for breakfast, and then, if there is no change, we’ll chuck it?”

“All right,” chorussed the others.

At seven, however, there was a very marked change : Crawford had won a hundred and fifty pounds.

“That’s better,” said the eldest Staples.

“I vote we go on.”

He was two hundred and fifty to the bad.

“Agreed,” said the others.

“Is any one sleepy?”

“I’m not, at all events,” said Crawford.

He could hardly keep his eyes open, and his head and limbs felt like lead.

At eight o’clock play was resumed, and Crawford’s good luck continued. But he went on like a man in a dream. Now and then he lost all consciousness of his surroundings for a moment, and even when

aroused he seemed only half awake; but though he was playing automatically, his good fortune kept steadily increasing the heap of counters at his left elbow.

At noon a few of the men who had been spectators the evening before came in to learn how the sitting had ended. They were overwhelmed with astonishment and envy when they heard that play had been continued all through the night and was still going on. They dropped into the card-room to see how the company bore the wear and tear of the night, and to gather how matters stood.

At one o'clock another halt was called for luncheon. The position of the players was then ascertained approximately. Two of the Staples and one of the other men had lost heavily, the youngest Staples had won a trifle, the other man was fifty pounds to the good, and William Crawford found

himself in possession of sixteen hundred pounds, or eleven hundred more than when he sat down.

“Have we not had enough of it?” he asked of the eldest Staples; “I feel very tired.”

“O,” cried Staples, “let us go on till one of us gives in. If luck keeps on as it has been running I shall be dished soon. Then we can stop.”

“All right,” said Crawford. To himself he said, “If the play leaves off before midnight I know I shall increase my winnings, for Hetty’s luck will be with me till then.”

At seven o’clock young Staples said, “What about dinner?”

“O, hang dinner!” cried his brother. “Let us play until I’m cleaned out. I mean to stop at another hundred.”

Crawford felt himself nod more than once between that and nine o’clock. He could no

longer readily distinguish hearts from diamonds or spades from clubs. He heard noises in his ears, and every now and then he had to shake himself up sharply to make himself realise where he was.

“Crawford, you’re falling asleep,” said the eldest of the brothers, “and I’ve got beyond that hundred. Shall we stop? We’ve been at it twenty-four hours.”

“I’ve been at it nearly thirty-six,” said Crawford, rising. “I have had no sleep for forty-eight hours. I cannot see the cards.”

“Shall we all dine together?” asked Staples. “This is an occasion which we ought to mark in some way or other.”

“For my part,” said Crawford, “I could eat nothing. I could not swallow a morsel until I sleep. I shall take a hansom and drive home.”

As he stumbled stupidly into the cab that evening he carried away from the

Counter Club two hundred pounds in gold, four hundred in notes, and sixteen hundred in cheques, making in all twenty-two hundred pounds, or seventeen hundred pounds more than he had brought into it the evening before. He directed the man to drive to Welford Bridge, and then settled himself comfortably in a corner to sleep on the way.

Before falling asleep he put his hand into his back pocket to ascertain if the revolver was there. "It's all right," he muttered. "After all, it's a great comfort to have it and to know I can defend myself and protect my money. But in reality, it isn't my money, but Hetty's. She brought me the luck. That's as plain as—" He started and stopped for a moment. A vivid flash of lightning had roused and stopped him for a second. "That's as plain as the lightning I have just seen." Before the

long roll of the distant thunder died in the east he was asleep.

In little over an hour the cab reached the South London Canal. The driver raised the trap in the roof, and shouted down :

“Welford Bridge, sir.”

“O, ay,” said Crawford, half awake.
“What is it?”

“This is Welford Bridge, sir.”

“Very good; I’ll walk the rest of the way.”

He got out and paid the man. Rain was now falling in perpendicular torrents. Every minute the sky was filled with dazzling pulses of swift blue flame. The crash and tear and roar of thunder was almost continuous.

Crawford was conscious of flashes and clash and crash overhead, and rain descending like a confluence of waterspouts, but he did not feel quite certain whether all

was the work of his imagination in dreams or of the material elements.

Dazed for want of sleep, and half-stunned by the clamour of the sky, and rendered slow and torpid by the clinging warm wetness of his clothes, he staggered along Welford Road and down Crawford Street.

“I shall sleep well to-night,” he thought, grinning grimly at his present uncomfortable plight.

Arrived at the door, he opened it with his latchkey. He stumbled along into the back hall with the intention of shaking the rain off his clothes before going up to his room.

The door on the quay from the back hall was wide open. He stood at it and looked out. The light from the kitchen pierced the gloom, and the rain streamed across the wet and glittering floating stage.

At that moment three pulses of fierce

blue light beat from sky to earth, illumining vividly everything which distance or the rain did not hide.

William Crawford saw by the swift blue light from heaven the form of a woman advancing towards him across the stage. He saw that she held an umbrella open above her head. He saw that she had red spots on her thin and worn face. He knew that this woman was Kate Mellor of three years back, the woman who had rescued him from death a few days ago.

It was plain she did not recognise him, he standing between her and the light in the hall. She said, shaking the umbrella :

“I brought this for you, Philip.”

Philip! Her brother! Philip Ray, her brother, who had sworn to kill him, must therefore be absolutely in the house under whose roof he now stood. Monstrous!

He turned swiftly round with a view to

gaining the foot of the stairs and dashing up before he could be recognised.

Under the light of the hall-lamp, and advancing towards him, was Philip Ray, Kate's brother. For a moment Philip stood stock still, regarding the other fixedly. Then with a yell the brother sprang forward, crying:

“By ——, 'tis he at last! 'Tis Ainsworth!”

With a shriek of terror and despair Crawford bounded through the open door out on the narrow quay, and turned sharply to the left. In a second Ray sprang out on the quay in pursuit. The darkness was so intense he could not see which way Crawford had taken. For a moment he stood in the light coming through the doorway.

It was at this instant Kate Bramwell stepped ashore off the stage. As she did

so two flashes in quick succession burst from the heavens. By this light she perceived Crawford standing half-a-dozen paces to the left of the back-door. She recognized him instantly. She saw that he had his right arm raised and extended on a line with his shoulder in the direction of her brother. She saw in his hand something metallic gleam in the lightning. With one bound she clasped her brother and strove with all her power to drag him down to the ground out of the line of the weapon. There was a snap, a loud report, and with a pang of burning pain in her shoulder, she fell insensible to the ground.

The thunder burst forth in a deafening roar.

The man who had fired the shot turned and fled headlong, he knew not, cared not, whither.

Suddenly he tripped over something and shot forward. He thrust out his hands to break his fall. They touched nothing. His whole body seemed to hang suspended in air for an instant. Then his hands and arms shot into water. His face was dashed against the smooth cold surface, and a boisterous tumult of water was in his ears, and his breathing ceased.

“The ice-house! No gates! Why do I not rise? If I do he will kill me. I cannot get out of this without help, and he is the only one near who could help, and he would kill me, would with pleasure see me drown a thousand times. When I rise I shall shout, come what may. I wonder is he dead? Why do I not rise? . . . Yes, now I know why I do not rise. The gold, the two hundred pounds in gold; and my clothes are already soaked through. I shall never rise. I

need struggle no more. I am going, going red-handed before the face of God."

That night William Crawford slept under ten feet of water, on the bed of ooze and slime, at the bottom of the flooded ice-house on Crawford's Bay.

The wounded woman never spoke again, never recovered consciousness. She passed peacefully away in the fresh clear light of early day.

It was not until the evening after the fatal night that, at the suggestion of Bayliss, the water of the flooded ice-house was dragged, and the body of William Crawford discovered. In the case of Kate Bramwell a verdict of wilful murder was brought in by the coroner's jury against William Crawford. In his own case the jury said that he was found drowned in the flooded ice-house, but how he happened to get

into the water there was no evidence to show.

Mrs. Farraday, who came at once to Richmond on receiving Crawford's letter, was careful to let no newspaper containing any account of the Welford tragedy near Mrs. Crawford. The patient and gentle invalid was gradually sinking. She never complained to any one of his desertion. She never told a soul of the money she had given him. Whatever she thought of his letter to her she kept to herself. Her evidence, no doubt, would have been required at the inquest if her health had been ordinary. But Dr. Loftus certified that the mere mention of his death would in all likelihood prove fatal to her.

About a month after his death she said one evening to Mrs. Farraday :

“I should like to get one letter from my husband, announcing his safe arrival before

I go on my long journey. But it is not to be. I shall not be here when the letter comes. Let no one open it. Let it be burnt unopened. The letters between a husband and wife ought to be sacred."

She was afraid something in it might militate against the good opinion in which those who had met Crawford in Richmond had held him.

One morning, about six weeks after the inquest, Mrs. Farraday thought the stricken woman was sleeping longer than usual as she had not rung her bell by half-past nine o'clock. Mrs. Farraday went to the bed and found the poor sufferer had glided from the troubled sleep of life into the peaceful sleep of eternity.

"It is a mercy," said the good and kind-hearted woman, "that she never knew the truth."

It is now two years since that awful

night. Once more Boland's Ait is uninhabited ; once more no one dwells on the shore of Crawford's Bay. But in a very small but comfortable and pretty house in one of the leafy roads of the south-east district, and not far from the great Welford Gasworks, live in amity and cheerful concord two small families consisting of Alfred Layard and his little son Freddie, and Philip Ray, his wife Hetty, and their tiny baby girl, who is called after the mother, but always spoken of as Hesper by the mother, because of the great seriousness with which young mothers ever regard their first little babes. Hetty declares Hesper to be the wisest child in all the realms of the empire, for she never by any chance utters a sound during the two hours each evening that Philip is busy with his pupils.

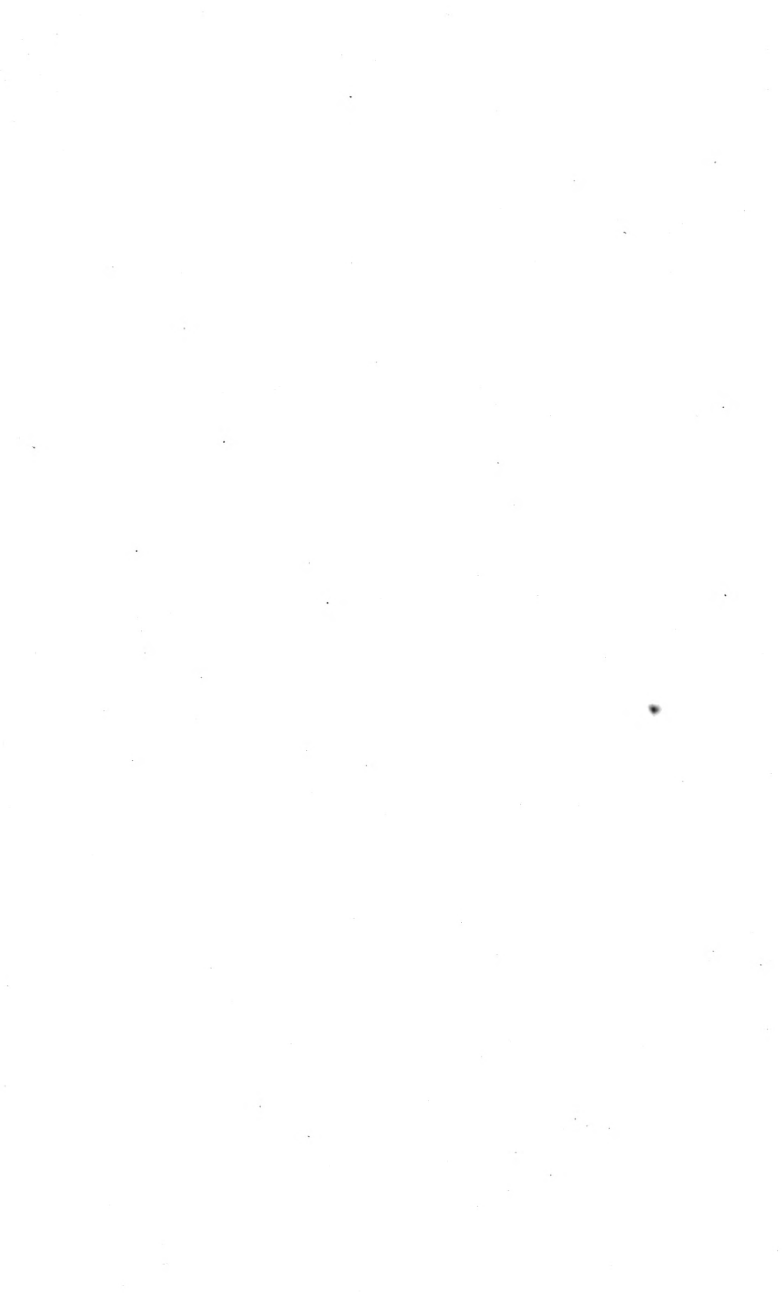
Bramwell lives with his boy in a cottage

at Barnet, where he is preparing for the press a selection from articles written by him in magazines during the past two years.

THE END.

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